

THE
MARRIAGE OF
GUENEVERE

RICHARD BOVEY

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LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE
A POEM IN DRAMAS

II. THE MARRIAGE OF GUENEVERE

BY RICHARD HOVEY

LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE

A POEM IN DRAMAS

I. THE QUEST OF MERLIN
A Masque

II. THE MARRIAGE OF GUENEVERE
A Tragedy

III. THE BIRTH OF GALAHAD
A Romantic Drama

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THE MARRIAGE OF CUENEVERE

RICHARD BOVEY



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THE MARRIAGE OF GUENEVERE

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A TRAGEDY

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PERSONS.

ARTHUR, King of Britain.

MERLIN, his Counsellor.

GODMAR, the Lord Marshal,

LAUNCELOT DU LAC,

ECTOR DE MARIS, Brother of Launcelot,

LIONEL,

BORS DE GANYNS, } Cousins of Launcelot,

GALAHAULT,

LADINAS DE LA ROUSE,

KAYE, Lord Seneschal of the Palace,

LEODEGRANCE, King of Cameliard.

PEREDURE, his Son, a Poet.

PUBLIUS, Ambassador from Rome.

PRYDERI, a Leech.

DAGONET, a Jester.

GAWAINE, a lad, son of Morgause.

BORRE, a child, illegitimate son of Arthur.

CAMALDUNA, Queen of Cameliard.

GUENEVERE, her Daughter, afterward Queen of Britain.

MORGAUSE, Arthur's sister, Queen of Orkney.

LIONORS, mother of Borre.

} *Knights of
the Round
Table.*

Knights, Ladies, Ambassadors, Herald, Pages, Watchmen, Attendants, etc.

Scene.—Britain.

Time.—May and June.

THE MARRIAGE OF GUENEVERE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*In the edge of a wood a cavalcade has dismounted and the horses are tethered among the trees. In the background MERLIN sits alone on a high place, looking at the towers of Cameliant, which are seen hazily in the distance. A group of Knights, seated in the foreground under a large oak tree, have just ended their repast and the attendants bring them beakers of wine. In this group may be noted SIR LIONEL, SIR ECTOR DE MARIS, SIR BORS DE GANYS, and SIR GALAHAULT. KING ARTHUR and SIR LAUNCELOT walk apart in private talk.*

ECTOR. Thou hast not loved, Sir Bors.

LIONEL. But *I* love, cousin—

As fair a maid as e'er wore taffeta.

That he would quaff mandragora to the drains
As revellers drink wine. Do you conceive,
His nearest friend beseeching, such a man
Would forego his carouse? But if his love
Came to him saying "Live, for I bid thee live,"
Though life and love alike were bitterness,
He would pour out the sweet death in the dust.

BORS. Love seeks a guerdon ; friendship is as God,
Who gives and asks no payment.

GALAHULT. Tut, ye are boys.
Ye deem of love as children play at arms
And wit not what a slain man is. Heard ye
Never of Arcite and of Palamon
That were good knights of old and as true friends
As e'er faced death together? Yet one day,
Seeing a fair lady in a garden close,
They fell a-wrangling. Faith, they were as twins,
Inseparate from the womb ; and yet swift love,
In less space than a man might look and say
"Lo there!" hath sundered them.

BORS. Look where the King
And Launcelot walk together. Think you that they
Would fall out for a girl?

GALAHAULT. Strange things ere now
Have happened and the memory of men
Outlived them. Yonder, dreaming in the sun,
Behold the towers of Cameliard ! Think *you*
The King, for love of Launcelot, would yield
The white enlacing arms of Guenevere,
Who waits there for the splendor of his coming
To make her Queen of Britain ?

LIONEL. Launcelot would,
If he were Arthur and Arthur Launcelot.
And yet I think that Arthur's love is thin
And substanceless to that which Launcelot
Bears the mysterious Lady of the Hills
Whom none have ever seen.

GALAHAULT. No fickle lover
Can prove the glory and the might of love.
The King has loved—and more than twice, I think.

LIONEL. Ay, he has been a gay dog in his day.

BORS. He is the sun. If there be spots in him,
I will not look upon them.

LIONEL. Nay, brother,
God shield I speak ill of the King. No man
This side of dotage loves him more than I.

I spoke of trivial faults. What one of us,
Unless it be yourself or Launcelot,
Hath not the like to answer? Even the tale
The common tongue hath of the Queen of Ork-
ney—

How is it more? They knew not of the bond
That made their sin more than the heat of youth
Might——

BORS. Hush! it is half treason but to think
What we give words to.

ECTOR. Morgause, the Queen of Orkney!
A strange dark woman!

GALAHULT. But a beauteous one.

[*The Knights rise at the approach of the King.*]

ARTHUR. We almost touch our journey's end,
my lords.

Expected joy is like a maid that nears
With coy delay and timorous advance,
Eluding our stretched hands. So have I thought
To-day would never reach us; yet it dawns.
And ere the sun sets in the western sea,
Your swords shall serve a Queen.

ECTOR. Long live the Princess!

LIONEL. But not as princess long ! Long live the
Queen !

A beaker to the bride !

ALL. Long live the Queen !

[*Enter a LADY, attended by a DWARF. She throws
herself at the King's feet.*]

LADY. If ever you inclined your ear to sorrow,
Be pitiful and hear me !

ARTHUR. Pray you, rise.

LADY. Nay, I will statue here until you grant
My prayer.

ARTHUR. You wrong yourself. What is your grief ?

LADY. Far back within the impenetrable hills
The mighty Turquine dwells—of those fierce tribes
Who yet acknowledge not our Saviour Christ
But worship barbarous and obscure gods,—
A wicked knave !—a cruel, treacherous villain !—
One whose delight is chiefly to work wrong
To all that call on Mary and her Son !
This unbelieving dog in his foul lair
With momentary tortures racks the bones
Of my true lover. Me, as well, he seized

And set his love on me—if that be love
Which such a beast so names—and swore an oath
To bind us each, if I received him not,
And make my living lord the pillow to
His savage purpose. But I, by God's help,
Beguiled him and escaped ; and with this weak
But faithful servitor, through lidless nights
And days that burned like fever in my brain,
Lurked in the caverns of the hills and made
The wild goats my companions.—Now, for thine
oath's sake

And in the name of all fair ladies wronged,
O King, I cry you, do me right.

ARTHUR.

Now by

My sword Excalibur, it were great shame
Forever to all knighthood if thy plight
Went unredressed. But I have that in hand
To-day which more imports me than the wrongs
Of all the world. To-day I take a wife.
It were a great dishonor if the feast
Were furnished and the bridegroom came not.
Therefore

Set on with us to Cameliard. To-morrow

We will set forth with all our chivalry
To hawk at this foul quarry.

LADY. Oh, my lord,
Think how each lapsing moment the quick groans
Of my chained lover clamor for release.
Wilt thou be like that recreant who said,
“ I have a wife and therefore cannot come,”
When the Lord of Heaven bade him ? Nay then, I see
You are even as other men, whom I had thought
To be almost divine. I know I come
Unseasonably. Grief hath, my lord, a license
To overpass the bounds of courtesy.—
Oh, is there none in all this chivalry
To piece his prayers to mine ?

LAUNCELOT. My lord the King,
I claim this quest. Go you to Cameliard
And have no care at heart. I, with three others,
Will seek and slay this Turquine, and set free
His mangled captives.

LADY. Thou and but three else ?

LAUNCELOT. It is sufficient.

LADY. Alas, you do not know
The peril of the enterprise !

ARTHUR.

Fear not.

It is Sir Launcelot of the Lake. He wons not
To fail of his pledged word.—My Launcelot,
I had wished that you should be on my right hand ;
But since it may not be—Our Lady speed you !

LAUNCELOT. Amen. Fair joy be to your bridal,
Arthur !

Farewell !—Now who's with me ?

LIONEL.

I.

BORS.

I.

ECTOR.

And I.

LADY. You are brave men. Come victory or
defeat,

I am bound to you forever.

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, we do

No more but our mere duties. Lead us on.

I know the mountain paths of old. Armor

And steeds would cumber us. We'll go afoot,

Armed no more heavily than now we stand.

Farewell, my liege ! And farewell, gentlemen !

We'll drink your healths ere long in Camelot.

[*Exeunt* LAUNCELOT, BORS, ECTOR, LIO-
NEL, *the* LADY, *and the* DWARF.]

ARTHUR. Ah, Galahault, with fifty men like that,
I would shape this old world like a putty-ball.—
Set on to Cameliard.

[*Enter a MESSENGER.*]

MESSENGER. My lord the King !
King Mark of Cornwall has renounced his fealty
And with a mighty army is encamped
Upon your borders. Sir Godmar, the Lord Marshal,
Has ta'en the field against him, but beseeches
You haste to his relief.

ARTHUR. Now, by my crown,
I will not go. The heavens conspire to block
My progress to the towers that hold my bride.
But stood the Archangel Michael in the way,
This marriage should not wait. We will go on ;
To-morrow morn is time enough for Mark.
Sir Galahault, our Queen shall be your charge
Until these wars are over. Come, set on !

[*While the cavalcade is preparing to move
the scene closes.*]

SCENE II.—*A rocky pass in the mountains. Enter*
LAUNCELOT, BORS, LIONEL, ECTOR, *the* LADY,
and the DWARF.

LAUNCELOT. Let me rest here a moment. Nay,
go on ;

I shall o'ertake you ere you gain the crest.
Cousin, a word with you.

[*Exeunt all but BORS and LAUNCELOT.*]

What blessed chance
Has led me hither ?

BORS. Cousin, you called me back.

LAUNCELOT. Why, but to have you with me,
Bors. This place

Is like a sudden scene of other days
That starts up in the middle of a dream ;

BORS. Have you been here ere now ?

LAUNCELOT. Ay, and that time
Would stand erect and vivid in my brain
Though all the other puppets of the past
Reeled into smoke. This is the very spot.

I lay here, cousin, even here where this gaunt bramble

Still tugs a meagre life out of the cleft
Where it is rooted,—faint almost to death ;
For I had struggled through these cruel hills
Three days without a crust, and my head swam
And my legs wavered under me and would not
Bear me upright. Down these precipitous crags
And o'er these dizzy ledges I could pass
No more than I could leap across yon gulf,
And I lay down and thought of death, as of
A gulf into whose blackness one might leap
And fall forever. A long time lay I so,
Too weak to struggle with impending doom,
And death seemed like to yawn and swallow
me.

BORS. And yet you are not dead. How 'scaped
you, then?

LAUNCELOT. God sent a blessed angel to my
aid.

There on the peak beyond the gulf I saw her,
Standing against the sky, with garments blown,
The mistress of the winds ! An angel, said I ?

God was more kind, he sent a woman to me.

BORS. The Lady of the Hills !

LAUNCELOT.

Ay, so I call her,

For other name I know not.

BORS.

The unknown lady,

Whom you have made more famous than a queen !

Here saw you her the first time ?

LAUNCELOT.

And the last time.

She was attended by a motley Fool,

Who stretched his hand and pointed where I lay.

She saw me and in pity of my case

Sent Master Dagonet—so the Fool was called

But he nowise would tell the lady's name—

To help me down the pass. But she went on

Alone across the summits of the hills

Like some grand free Diana of the North

And passed out of my sight, as daylight fades

Out of the western sky. But I no more

Was faint, and went my way, considering.

BORS. But could you nowise find out who she
was ?

LAUNCELOT. Nowise, for Merlin met me there-
upon,

And brought me suddenly to Camelot,
Where I was knighted. I had fain delayed
But boy-like shamed to say wherefore my heart
Hung back toward the hills. And so I passed
Away from her and never saw her more.

BORS. Even here it was you saw her?

LAUNCELOT. Ay, even here.

BORS. Why, then, should you not meet her here
again?

LAUNCELOT. The hope of that is as the morning-
star,

The messenger of dawn. And in good sooth
I have a feeling in my heart that soon
My long and lightless service shall have end
And I shall serve her seeing. But our friends
Await us. I shall serve my lady better
With noble actions than with idle dreams.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III. — *Cameliard. The Palace of Leode-
grance. A chamber hung with rich embroider-
ies. At the centre a wide entrance with heavy
curtains, which conceal a corridor. At the*

upper right corner a window opening on a balcony which overlooks the sea. GUENEVERE is seated before this window with a harp.

GUENEVERE. [*Sings*]. The flower-born Blodueda,
Great joy of love was hers ;
Now lonely is the life she leads
Among the moonlit firs.

The white enchantress, Arianrod,
The daughter of King Don,
Hath hidden in a secret place
And borne a goodly son.

But he shall have nor name nor arms
Wherewith to get him fame,
Unless his mother's heart relent
And give him arms and name.

Twice hath she cursed him from her heart—
Twice and yet once again,
That he shall never take a wife
Of all the seed of men.

Yet all unwitting she gave him arms,
When the foe was in the land ;
And all unwitting a goodly name,
Llew of the Steady Hand.

And Gwydion, the son of Don,
Hath wrought with mighty charms
A mystery of maidenhood
To lie within his arms.

He took the blossoms of the oak
And the blossoms of the broom
And the blossoms of the meadow-sweet
And fashioned her therefrom.

Of all the maidens on the earth
She was by far most fair,
And the memory of the meadow-sweet
Was odors in her hair.

But she hath given her heart away
To the stout lord of Penllyn,
And he is slain by Cynvael's banks,
Betrayed by all his kin.

And oh, and she were light of heart

Had they but slain her so !

In likeness of a mournful owl,

She grieves her nightly woe.

The motherless Blodueda

Shall never find release ;

From eve till morn she makes her moan

Among the moonlit trees.

[*While GUENEVERE sings, MORGAUSE has entered,
unperceived.*]

MORGAUSE. It is a sad song for a bride to sing.

GUENEVERE. I did not know that anyone was
near.

MORGAUSE. I did not mean to be an eaves-
dropper,

But as I entered I was charmed to silence

And could not break in on so sweet a sound

Before the singer ceased.

GUENEVERE. I thank you, madam ;

I am not in the mood for compliments to-day.

MORGAUSE. Not to-day of all days in the year,

In which the sun shines on you as a bride ?
Fair weather weddings make fair weather lives.

GUENEVERE. I care not much for omens.

MORGAUSE. Come, sweetheart,
There is a time to mask and to unmask,
And on a wedding morn the light of joy
Should frolic on the face as in the heart.
The courtiers will set up a silly tale
That this alliance is against your will.

GUENEVERE. But I do nothing, save of my free will;
Let the vain gossips babble as they please.

MORGAUSE. I have just come from the Great
Hall. You'll have
A royal ritual, sweetheart,—such a retinue
Of dames and damosels, barons and knights,
As Cæsar's self could hardly muster in
Imperial Rome.

GUENEVERE. Is Peredure without ?

MORGAUSE. Gods, hear this woman ! I tell her
of her wedding ;
She answers me—" Is Peredure without ? "
Ha, ha, ha, ha ! Now what would Arthur say
To find himself so hindward in your thoughts ?

GUENEVERE. Peredure is not like my other
brothers,

Wolf-eyed, thick-bearded, fond of dealing blows.

There's something of the woman in his nature

That makes his manliness a finer thing.

He has the courage of a gentle heart——

MORGAUSE. And he writes the prettiest rhymes
that ever were

About some marvellous woman that he loves

But whom he dare not woo. Poor boy, when he

Is older, he will find the woman lives not

Too virtuous to be flattered by a conquest.

I left him in the throng about the throne

With such a woful look upon his face,

As if the rhymes of his last virelay

Were all at loggerheads.

GUENEVERE. Does he not go
With us to Camelot?

MORGAUSE. 'T is so determined.
I marvel that Sir Launcelot is not here.

A month ago, ere I left Camelot

To seek a friend where I must find a sister,

It was supposed that Launcelot would be

The chief of Arthur's groomsmen. Arthur and he
Are like two almonds in a single shell
That silly maids make matron wishes on.

GUENEVERE. I had a strange dream yesternight.
Methought
An unknown knight stood by my bed, and as
I lay spell-bound in dim bewilderment,
Cried "I am Launcelot!"—and I awoke.

MORGAUSE. He came, then, in a dream. I
thought he would not
Be so discourteous as to keep away
Entirely.

GUENEVERE. Why talk ye all of Launcelot?
His fame spreads westward over Wales like dawn.

MORGAUSE. He has the reputation of all virtue.

GUENEVERE. And does his reputation top himself?

MORGAUSE. Sometimes a bonfire imitates the
dawn.

GUENEVERE. Sometimes, too, dawn is taken for
a bonfire ;—
I care not. Dawn or bonfire, it is nothing
To me.

MORGAUSE. Nor to me neither, but I chafe
To hear the gabble that they make about him.
Why, child, the world is gone mad at his heels!
They tell of valor that despises odds,
And courtesy that throws prudence to the drains—
Such tales they tell of him! And as for women,
There is not maid nor wife in Camelot
Whose heart is not a spaniel at his feet.
And yet they say he takes no fruit of it
But is as spotless as Saint Dorothy—
With such a tittle-tattle of his purity!—
Bah, when the King and he are in one cry!

GUENEVERE [*rises*]. What do you mean?

MORGAUSE. Oh, nothing—I mean nothing.
Your husband is no worse than other men.
The Lady Lionors has a little boy,
But, though he certainly looks like the King——

GUENEVERE. Why do you tell me this?

MORGAUSE. You must know some time
What you had better learn from friends than
foes.

You are leaving now the world of fairy tales,
Where all the men are true of heart and chaste

And all the women chaste and true of heart.
You enter now the world in which we live ;
You'll find it peopled in another fashion.
Here comes a very wise philosopher—
Ask him.

[*Enter* DAGONET.]

GUENEVERE. How now, sir ? You look soberly.

DAGONET. I ? I am as merry as a skull, and that
is always grinning, as you would see if you could but
look beneath the skin.

GUENEVERE. A grim jest, sirrah.

DAGONET. Ay, it is ill jesting at a wedding.
Aristophanes himself, who first wore motley, would
go hang for lack of a laugh. For your good unctuous
jest must have a soil of light hearts or it will not
grow ; and there is a predisposition at weddings to
solemnity.

GUENEVERE. Nay, now you are out ; for a wedding is a joyous matter.

DAGONET. But no laughing matter, my lady.
For various wise philosophers have observed that in
moments of most exquisite pleasure the expression

of the face is solemn. What signifies a wedding? Harmony. Now the essence of a jest is contradiction, but that comes after the wedding. So no more jests from me, my lady, till you have done with eating green cheese, which is excellent diet for the moonstruck—but I prefer Stilton.

MORGAUSE. Tell us, then, good Dagonet, what is the most pregnant occasion of jesting.

DAGONET. A funeral, for the long faces of the company provoke the merry devil in the brain as inevitably as a Puritan calls out mockery from the reprobate. I have known an accidental rasp on a viol to set all the mourners—except the paid ones—in a titter.

[*Sings.*] With ribald chalkings on his coat

Sir Pompous struts the street,

And wanton boys put walnut-shells

On stately Tabby's feet.

Ri fol de riddle rol.

GUENEVERE. Make jests at my funeral, I prithee, Dagonet.

DAGONET. Death himself is the greatest jester. He is the farce that follows all tragedies. For is it not supremely ridiculous that I myself, about whom to-day the universe revolves, may to-morrow be reduced to the level of Alexander or any common dead body?

MORGAUSE. Do you make yourself greater than Alexander, Fool?

DAGONET. Ay, or any other corpse, for I am alive and "a dead lion"—But the worms have eaten that, too. But here come the King and Queen. I was sent to announce them, but these lofty matters have made me forget my duty. Philosophy will undo me yet.

[*Enter* LEODEGRANCE, CAMALDUNA, PRYDERI, MERLIN, GALAHAULT, *and Attendants.*]

MERLIN. May Britain find its peace in you, my child.

I have given my life to make a State. I found
The Saxons ravaging our fields, our King
The traitor Vortigern, within ourselves
Each petty lord in arms against his neighbor,

And man to man belligerent. But I
Shall leave my country one, victorious,
Organic and at peace. And in the top
Of this great arch of empire you are set
A keystone, that it may not fall, when Arthur
And I take our supporting hands away.
Your destiny is glorious, to be
Mother of kings and mother of a realm.

GUENEVERE. And mother of my people, sir, I
trust.

GALAHULT. The homage duty soon must pay
my queen,
Beauty compels beforehand to the woman.

GUENEVERE. You use fair words at Camelot, my
lord ;
Our mountain courtiers have a blunter speech.

MERLIN [*to Morgause*]. Still where the quarry is
the falcons fly.

MORGAUSE. This riddle has no key. Why do
you speak,
If you desire not to be understood ?

MERLIN. I wish and I wish not to be divined,
And you divine me and divine me not.

For you are not so subtle as you think
Nor half so simple as you would be thought.

[Returns to the King. GUENEVERE, MORGAUSE, GALAHAULT, and DAGONET walk apart and after a little go out upon the balcony:]

LEODEGRANCE. Why interchange you with the
Queen of Orkney
These hostile brows ?

MERLIN. Though she be Arthur's sister,
Near is too near, unless——

LEODEGRANCE. I understand you.
Happy the man in whose own household lurks
No secret enemy to undermine
His purpose and his joy. But she will make
No mischief here. My girl feels honor keenly
And will not stoop to listen to intrigue.

MERLIN. I doubt it not. The very waywardness
That rumor speaks of her, shows a great soul,
That feels too prisoned even upon a throne.

CAMALDUNA. Indeed, she is not like a common
girl,
And I could never make her do as others.

LEODEGRANCE. Wild as the sea-mew, restless
of restraint,

She roams the jutting capes of Cameliard,
Like some strange dweller of the mountain winds,
Half kelpie and half woman. The highlander,
Chasing the roe o'er cliff and chasm, has often
Seen her lithe form rise from the treeless crag
Like smoke from a hunter's fire, and crossed himself,
Thinking he saw a creature not of earth.

MERLIN. I know her kind. It is a temperament
That suffers and achieves.

CAMALDUNA. A little girl,
She frightened the nurses more with her strange
thoughts

Than ever they her with bogles. I remember
Her creeping from her bed once in midwinter
To ask if moonbuds only bloomed at night
That dead men, when they leave their graves to
walk,

Might have their flowers also like the living.

PRYDERI. As the young limbs enlarge, the bones
will ache ;

Our oldwives call such ailments "growing pains."

What our young princess needs is that her thoughts
Be drawn away from looking on herself.
The duties and responsibilities
That push us from our dreams and make us sane
By contact with the solid stuff of life,
These things a woman finds in household cares.
The wife and mother has no time to break
The wings of girlish thoughts with idle beating
Against the bars of Fate. Our princess, too,
Must bear the dignity of greater burdens,
Which for a soul imperious is good fortune.
Therefore, as a physician, who must watch
Both mind and body as they interact,
I have prescribed this marriage as a medicine.

LEODEGRANCE. This counsel of our wise and
learned leech

Inclined us much to urge on Guenevere
A speedy yes to Arthur's suit. At first
She was, indeed, rebellious to our wish
And marriage thoughts were wormwood to her will.
Nathless I was unwilling to assert
My power as King and father to compel
Her course ; for still I find the easy yoke

The popular. Yet, short of straight command,
The Queen and Pryderi,—and I myself,—
Have day and night reiterated words,
Soliciting with cogent argument,
Till she consented. She herself now chooses
The man of all men I would have her lord.
For I have not forgotten how King Arthur
With Ban and Bors routed my enemies
And with their triple armies saved my crown.—
Go, call the princess hither. Yet in sooth,
What should an old man say to a young maid?
The Queen shall speak to her. Madam, we shall
Withdraw and leave her to your tutelage.

GUENEVERE. You called me, sire.

LEODEGRANCE. To say farewell, my child,
Before I yield thee to thy bridegroom's arms.
Our Lady Mary keep thee! Come, my lords.

MERLIN. I wish you greatness, lady.

MORGAUSE. And I goodness.

PRYDERI. I health and length of days.

GALAHULT. I happiness.

[*Exeunt* LEODEGRANCE, MERLIN, PRYDERI,
MORGAUSE, and GALAHULT.]

DAGONET. And I a light heart and an easy pal-
frey that the way may seem short to Camelot.

[*Sings.*] Merrily canter on through life
And joy shall be your store,
But if you ride a trotting nag
Your buttocks will be sore.
Ri fol de riddle rol.

[*Exit.*]

CAMALDUNA. So far, my daughter, you have
walked your way,
Self-willed, imperious, like a wanton child
That will not let her parents hold her hand,
Yet knows them near to save her if she fall.
Now they will not be near, and you may find
That freedom lays a weight upon our souls
That often we would like to shift to others.
I fear that counsel is poured out on you
Like an effectless wind ; yet hear my words.
Take you no woman in your confidence,
But seem to do so. Each has her own ends,
And would betray you seventy times over,
And yet, repulsed, her selfishness through pique

May aggravate to active enmity.
Speak freely, but say little. Do not strive
Too far to outshine the ladies of the court
In jewelled ornaments and regal garb ;
They'll hate you for it. Be profuse of favors ;
They cost you little and will buy you hearts.
Yet do not play the braggart with your bounty—
Scorn lies beneath too much magnificence—
But always give as if the gifts were trifles
To eyes that see to whom the gifts are given.
All women are your natural enemies ;
Think your end gained if they refrain from hate,
But seek your friends among the other sex.
Men have no quarrel with your eminence ;
Your glory with their glory does not war,
But each may gain some splendor from the other.
Therefore, they may be faithful ; but admit them
Only to the antechamber of your thoughts,
That their imagination may have scope
To fashion a dream-Guenevere to serve.
Not what we are but what men deem of us,
Is the true prince. Be faithful to your husband,
Yet not so servient as to jade his fondness.

Let him be often foreign to your life
That he may feel your lack and woo you over.
Be not too common to him. Hold him off
That you may bind him to you. For in him
Your domination lies. See that he has
No friend that is not yours, no counsellor
Whose secret thoughts are not your interests.
Be chaste as snow in heart as well as deed ;
One spark of love may light a fire to burn
The edifice of your greatness to an ash.
Nor be contented with the innocent fact
But make your seeming lock the lips of slander.
And yet you may have lovers if you will ;
The more the better, so you love not them.
For till we yield we are our lovers' tyrants,
But afterward their slaves. Remember this.

GUENEVERE. Pray you, a little space alone, good
mother.

[CAMALDUNA *kisses Guenevere, and then goes
out.*]

Why, what a thing is woman ! She is brought
Into the world unwelcome. The mother weeps
That she has born a daughter to endure

A woman's fate. The father knits his brows
And mutters "Pish, 't is but a girl!" A boy
The very hounds had bayed for with delight.
Her childhood is a petty tyranny.
Her brothers cross her ; she must not resist,—
Her father laughs to see the little men
So masterful already. Even the mother
Looks on her truculent sons with pride and bids
Her yield, not thwart them — "You are but a
girl."

A girl!—and must give way ! She must be quiet,
Demure—not have her freedom with the boys.
While they are running on the battlements,
Playing at war or at the chase, she sits
Eating her heart out at embroidery frames
Among old dames that chatter of a world
Where women are put up as merchandise.
—Oh, I have slipped away a thousand times
Into the garden close and scaled the wall
And fled from them to freedom and the hills.
And I have passed the women in the fields,
With stupid faces dulled by long constraint,
Bowing their backs beneath the double burden

Of labor and unkindness—all alike,
Princess and peasant, bondslaves, by their sex !
Ah, the gray crags up whose sheer precipices
I have so often toiled, to throw myself
Panting upon their crests at last and lie
For whole long afternoons upon the hard
Delicious rock in that sweet weariness
That follows effort, with a silent joy
In obstacles that I could overcome.
They never called me girl, those mighty peaks !
They knew no sex,—they took me to their hearts
As if I were a boy. Oh, the wild thrill
That tingled in the veins, when the strong winds
Came howling like a pack of hungry wolves
That make the wintry forests terrible
Beneath the Norland moon ! “Shriek on,” I cried,
“Rave, howl, roar, bellow, till you split your
throats !
You cannot mar the pinnacled repose
Of these huge mountain-tops. They are not
women !”
Why, what an idle rage is this ! Am I
The Guenevere those still grand mountains know ?

This is a bridal garment that I wear.
I am another Guenevere, a thing—
I know not what. I go to a new life.
I have ordered a new pair of manacles.
Arthur? As well Arthur as another—
I care not. If I must, I must. To live
The old life is no longer tolerable.

[*Enter PEREDURE.*]

My brother! You have come to see my gown.
Is it not beautiful? And see, this diadem
To show I——

PEREDURE. Guenevere! How is it with you?

GUENEVERE. Why, as it should be with a bride.

It seems

You ask strange questions, brother. I had thought
I should be greeted with felicitations.

They say, a maid upon her wedding morn

Is timorous, fluttered, casts regretful eyes

—Or so she fancies—on her maidenhood,

And yet is glad withal. Seem I not so,

My brother? Am I——?

PEREDURE.

All's not well with you.

You seem as one that in a waking dream
Does—what, she knows not—with mechanic limbs.
My sister, dost thou act of thy free will?

GUENEVERE. Who acts so? Life and custom
close us in

Between such granite walls of circumstance
That, when we choose, it is not as we would
But between courses where each likes us not.
No, Peredure, it is not by constraint,
Save of the iron skies, I meet my lot.
I have not chosen it, but I accept it.

PEREDURE. Think well. Once done, this can-
not be undone.

You love not Arthur. This is not the face
Of one that hastens to her lover's arms.
Think you that you will ever love him?

GUENEVERE.

Love?

I have heard of it. Poets sing of it.
It must be a strange thing, this love.

PEREDURE.

Alas,

If thou shouldst learn what thing it is too late !
Girl, knowest thou what marriage means? Oh, if
When once the fatal ring is on thy finger,
Thou shouldst encounter some one who should
kindle

Thy latent heart to flame. To be caressed
When thou art cold — this is a bitter thing.
But to be fondled by an unloved hand,
When all the soul is in another's arms —
That were a horror and a sacrilege.

GUENEVERE. I shall not love. But sometime I
must wed.

It is the law for women that they marry;
Else they endure a scorned inactive fate,
Unwelcome hangers-on at others' tables.
Besides, a girl's life is a cabined one;
A married woman has a wider scope.
She, too, is chained but with a longer tether;
She moves in the great world, and by that craft
God gives to creatures that have little strength,
May leave her impress on it. As for Arthur,
He is a very princely gentleman,
One whom at least I never shall despise.

PEREDURE. Men say he is the crown of chivalry,
The pattern of the virtues of a knight.
But should he cloud the clear sky of thy life,
I ne'er should pardon him.

GUENEVERE. My brother!

PEREDURE. Dear,
I fear that Arthur ne'er will know as I
The gentleness of this imperious spirit.
I have asked Morgause much——

GUENEVERE. I hate that woman.

PEREDURE. Oh, say not so, she is so fair! O
sister,
I did not think to tell thee of my sorrows
At such a season. When I spoke of love
And pleaded with thee to have fear of it,
I had good reason for my earnestness.
I know myself too well the hopeless woe
Of love debarred, against which Fate is set.
I love Morgause——

GUENEVERE. Morgause? The Queen of
Orkney?

The wife of Lot?

PEREDURE. Ay, Guenevere, even so——

I love her. I would give my hopes of heaven
To press my lips against that flower-like mouth
And call her mine ! Ay, I would die to feel
Once on my cheek the swan-soft touch of hers !
But I must make a dungeon of my heart
To hide my love in like a malefactor,—
Or like some hapless prisoner of state
Who ne'er did wrong but must be shut from the sun
For the realm's safety and in some dark cell
Is numbered with the dead. Oh, think of this
And do not build a prison for thyself
From whose barred windows thou may'st sometime
see

Love beckoning to thee when thou canst not come !
There is no sorrow like a love denied
Nor any joy like love that has its will.
Oh, keep thy feet unbound to follow Love
When he shall come to lead thee to his rest !
Keep thy hands free to take his proffered gifts,
Thy heart unbound by barriers that prevent
The joy he would, but for our blindness, bring
To make a rapture and a song of life !
Believe——

GUENEVERE. You talk of songs and raptures !

Go

Back to your poetry, you child of dream !

Life is to be supported, not enjoyed.

PEREDURE. Oh, no ! it is to be enjoyed. Why
else

Should God have made the world so beautiful ?

And yet for me the glory of the hills,

The beauty of the sky's dissolving blue,

And all the woven magic of the grass

Have dulled their loveliness, and all their splendor

Cannot arouse again the ancient thrill.

There is a grayness over all the world.

Love is not to be mocked at, Guenevere.

Take heed ! Look in thy heart, and be assured

That thou hast read it rightly. If a doubt,

If but the faint foreboding of a scruple

Be there, delay, break off this rash——

GUENEVERE.

Too late !

[The curtains at the centre are drawn apart, revealing a company of ladies in festal attire, with garlands, etc. A distant sound of chanting.]

See where my bridesmaids wait with wreaths of
roses

To lead me to the altar and the prince.

PEREDURE. Is it a triumph or a sacrifice?

GUENEVERE. God knows! For me, I have chosen
to go this course,

And I will keep to it till the event.

Exit with bridesmaids.]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Camelot. The gardens.* MORGAUSE,
PEREDURE, LIONORS, GAWAINE, DAGONET,
KAYE, *and others.*

MORGAUSE. The day is dull. Shall we have
music?

KAYE. Ay,
A rousing song!

LIONORS. He's all for tavern catches
Or martial strains of braggadocio.

DAGONET. It is the finitude of his wit, whereof
he has neither enough to be merry without drinking
nor to be silent when drunk.

KAYE. Drunk, varlet?

DAGONET. If I called it a finer name, you would
not follow me.

LIONORS. Nay, for that would be false manners.
Would you have the nobleman follow the fool?

DAGONET. No more than I would have the ass

follow the driver. Let me but carry the whip and he shall take precedence as much as he will.

MORGAUSE. Peredure, is there not a madrigal
Knocking against your heart to be let out ?
Our idleness feeds on the empty day
As a chameleon on the air. Come, sing
And give us richer nurture.

PEREDURE. As you will.
There is a story written in this book
Of two young lovers in far Italy
And how they dreamed away a summer noon
Upon the Arno. Reading this but now,
I fell a-dreaming, *I* was in the boat,
And round *my* neck her wondrous arms were
thrown—
And then, I scarce know how, the song was made.

[*Sings.*] Love me !
I care not for this one brief hour
If blue calm smile or tempest lower
Above me.
I care not though the boat sink now
If only thou
Wilt love me.

Must be my plea. Lord Publius comes from Rome
With weighty missives from the Emperor.
While he awaits the King's return from Cornwall,
He must not sigh for the Campagna.

MORGAUSE.

Welcome.

Will you make one of our too idle party ?
We have been merry with inconsequences,
Tossing our empty fancies back and forth
Like shuttlecocks, for wantonness. I fear
You are too serious for these bagatelles.

PUBLIUS. Let me not spoil your entertainment,
madam.

So many fair young faces are about me,
Such a spring-burst of beauty and of youth,
I shall grow young myself for sympathy.

GAWAINE [*apart to* LIONORS]. What an old flub!

[*Aloud.*] Now, madam, if you like,
I'll sing a song I learned the other day
And wager twenty pounds against a shilling
Mine is the better love-song of the two.

MORGAUSE. What say you, ladies? Shall this
fledgling sing?

LIONORS. I am sure he will sing well.

GAWAINE [*apart to* LIONORS]. I'll pay that
speech

With twenty kisses for a word to-night.

[*Sings.* MORGAUSE, PUBLIUS, *and* LADINAS
converse apart earnestly.]

It was a sonsie shepherd lass
So early in the morning
That tripped across the dewy grass
And tossed her curls for scorning.

But ere she passed the brook, she cast
A look across her shoulder
That made the pitapats come fast
And yet my heart grew bolder.

A look, a smile, a jest, a sigh,
A kiss and, ere we're madder,
A glance to see that no one's nigh—
And this is Cupid's ladder.

LIONORS. Oh, fie! it is a jade's song. Naughty
boy,
You must be good or you'll be sent to bed.

DAGONET [*to Peredure*]. She cries "boy" too loudly. Oh, la la! Ostriches, ostriches!

MORGAUSE. Come, let's to tennis. [*To Peredure.*]
Will you play with me?

DAGONET [*aside*]. Ay, that he will, and lose the game too, for all your faults.

[*Some play and the others gather about as spectators.*]

LADINAS [*to Publius*]. What think you? Have I not achieved an ally of great price?

PUBLIUS. It is well done. And no one of the court

Suspects you are Rome's secret emissary?

LADINAS. Suspect a Knight of the Round Table?

They would

As soon suspect the blessed angels.

PUBLIUS. Yet

There was a Lucifer——

LADINAS. No more of that!

I do not mean to sell my contraband

For barren rank or tinsel decorations.

I am no barbarous chieftain of the Zaire

To trade my ivory for a string of beads.
I must have money ; you must make me rich
Beyond the power of prodigality
To dissipate—rich, rich ; the rest is toys
For babes to play with !

PUBLIUS. You shall have your will.

But say what motive pricks the Queen of Orkney ?

LADINAS. She hates the King as none can hate
but they

Who once have loved. It is the tale that ere
The mystery of Arthur's parentage
Was by his mother's oath made clear, he fought
With Lot of Orkney and defeated him.
Then came this queen, Morgause, the wife of Lot,
And Arthur's sister, but they knew it not ;
And Arthur was enamoured, nor was she
Unwilling. And, indeed, men say a child
Was born and hidden somewhere in the hills,
And that by him his father shall be slain.
And others say the King is free from stain,—
None knows. But't is most certain that they loved ;
And still the Queen of Orkney will not think
That Arthur is her brother, but believes

[*Enter GALAHAULT.*]

GALAHAULT. Good news !

Ladies, glad news ! Sir Launcelot is returned.

SEVERAL. What say you ? Launcelot ?

GALAHAULT. Launcelot and his kinsmen,
Lionel and Ector and the good Sir Bors.

[*Enter LAUNCELOT and BORS.*]

MORGAUSE. All honor to the realm's pre-eminent
knight,

Returned, I doubt not, from a glorious quest !

Honor and welcome to the good Sir Bors !

LAUNCELOT. Thanks, gentle lady. Joy be with
you all !

Where is the King ?

DAGONET. Welcome to Camelot—
To my new capital of Foolery !

LAUNCELOT. What, Dagonet ! [*Aside.*] The Fool !
Where is the lady ?

DAGONET. You have too good a memory, sir, for
a man of place. But, indeed, I knew not it was you
when I saved you. Nathless, without me you had

not done these great deeds ; ergo, you must have done them with me. Now see what it is to be modest ; I had no idea I was a man of this mettle.

MORGAUSE [*aside*]. What's this ? What's this ?

LAUNCELOT. Now, by my sword, I am
Right glad to see your merry face again.
Where is the King ?

DAGONET. Why, I am king now and these are my subjects. See you not how, like good courtiers, they mimic me ?

KAYE. How do we mimic you, sirrah ?

DAGONET. Marry, by making fools of yourselves.

LADINAS. The King, sir, is in Cornwall at the wars.

LAUNCELOT. I am right sorry that he is not here,
For since I set my face toward Camelot,
For joy that I should see him I have been
Light-hearted as a boy. I would clasp hands
And wish him happiness with his young bride !
The rumor of her beauty has gone out
From end to end of Britain. I have heard
She moves among our gardens like a dream
Of empirod loveliness in far Cathay.

Lead me to her, Sir Galahault. I must
Do homage to my queen. Ah, gentle lady—
She shall not find in Camelot, I swear,
A heart more leal to her than Launcelot's.
Henceforth I'll wear no colors in the lists
But those of Arthur's bride.

[*Enter GUENEVERE and LADIES. She stops in the
centre, looking at LAUNCELOT.*]

Dear Galahault,
'T is my first duty both to king and friend
To lay my good sword at his lady's feet.
Lead me to her——
Bors! Galahault! Is it——? It is——

GALAHULT. The Queen!

LAUNCELOT. I shall be leal to her indeed. Just
God!

[*He recovers himself. As he steps forward
with GALAHULT toward the QUEEN the
scene closes.*]

SCENE II.—*The Apartments of GALAHAULT. Enter* LAUNCELOT, GALAHAULT, *and* BORS.

BORS. Prithee, Galahault, a stoup of wine! I have the dust of seven kingdoms in my throat.

GALAHAULT. Some wine, ho!

BORS. What, Launcelot, not a word? I have not seen thee so cast down since Ector was taken captive by that rude infidel, Sir Turquine, whom thou slew'st.

[*Enter a SERVANT with wine.*]

What, man, gladden thy heart with this.

[*Drinks.*]

LAUNCELOT. I think that wine will never be aught but bitter to me again, and that I shall hate the perfume of flowers and the melody of lutes and mandolins as long as I live. Oh, my friends, I am but the husk of what I was, and all that was savory in me is consumed.

[*Exit SERVANT with cups, etc.*]

BORS. Thou'st not been thyself since we were

presented to the Queen. I mind me now how thou didst start then and heave thy sides, as if thou 'dst seen a spirit. What—Galahault—is 't possible?

GALAHAUT. O Bors, Bors, Bors, the maids of Camelot

Say rightly that thou hast not loved ; for else His sorrow were no riddle.

BORS. Nay, to me

A riddle darker with increasing light.

What, is the Lady of the Hills forgot?

Have human hearts no stronger faith? For I

Had looked to thee, O cousin, as the type

Of faith. Wilt thou betray the King, thy friend,

Even in thought?

LAUNCELOT. Peace, peace! What ails that I

Should e'er be false to Arthur? Rest you safe,

I have no lady if it be not she

Whom I have called the Lady of the Hills.

BORS. Nay, cousin, use me frankly.

LAUNCELOT. Betray the King?

Thou talkest of thou knowest not what. Is 't possible

That I betray the King?

BORS.

What name was it

You gave the jester that we met below?

GALAHULT. What, here? His name is Dagonet.

The Queen

Brought him with her from Cameliard.

BORS.

The Queen?

Dagonet? By heaven, it is as clear as noon.

This is the very Fool that saved his life

For he did call him Dagonet that day

He told the story to me. And the Queen,

The Queen herself's the Lady of the Hills.—

Thou lovest her.

LAUNCELOT. Ay, as the lost love heaven!

BORS. Alas, I pity thee; thy stars are evil.

But thou art noble and wilt not forget

Thy triple duty, God, the King, thy friend.

LAUNCELOT. Duty? The word is colder than
the moon.

Thou art an icy counsellor. Dost think

That love will, like a hound that licks my hand,

Down at my bidding? Nay, thou hast not loved,

Nor dost not know that when Love enters in,

He enters as a master, not a slave.

GALAHULT. True, Launcelot, Love is tameless
as wild beasts.

Chains for his limbs but leave his spirit more free
To think the thing it may not act. Hunger
Is his best nourishment and he grows apace
Upon starvation. If he die at all,
He dies of surfeit, not of abstinence.

BORS. But shall our champion of an hundred
fights,
Whose name is one with valor's, be o'erthrown
By an effeminate longing, like a girl?

GALAHULT. Speak not in scorn of love, Sir
Bors. There are
But two things under heaven unconquerable
And certain, Love and Death.

[*Enter a PAGE.*]

PAGE [*to* LAUNCELOT]. My lord, your brothers
Have sent to seek you.

LAUNCELOT. Good, my cousin Bors,
Go thou for me; I cannot see them now;—
I have no heart.

BORS.

Go, tell them I come quickly.

[*Exit PAGE.*]

You will be your great self and turn this love,
If it be true that 't will not be cast out,
To something high and noble. It may be,
As I can hardly think but that you live
Under some special warrant, that God means
You should do great deeds in your lady's name,
And in the chronicles of Time be set
For an example to the yet unborn
How love may cast out love's disloyalties,
And lovers, marvelling at such sacrifice,
Shall say, "So loved the good knight Launcelot."

[*Exit.*]

LAUNCELOT. "The traitor Launcelot!" for I
hear them now, —

Cold, scornful voices of futurity
That speak so cruel-calmly of the dead !
Oh, Galahault, for love of my good name
Pluck out your sword and kill me, for I see
Whate'er I do, it will be violence —
To soul or body, others or myself.
You will not? It would be a kindly deed.

—And yet I saw her first. What right had he
To steal her from me ? I have served her well
Two years, laid all my laurels at her feet,
Won all my victories in her sweet name,
Though yet I knew it not. What right had he—— ?
Nay, nay, she loves him—who could love him not ?—
And I shall hate him, hate my dearest friend,
Because——oh, God ! oh, God !

GALAHAULT. Why grieve so soon ?
You know not yet if she denies your love.
What if she should not ?

LAUNCELOT. Galahault ! You make
My poor head dizzy with quick-coming hopes.
What !—you mean ?—it cannot be——

GALAHAULT. Why not ?
She does not love the King ; of that I am certain.
Sure, you are worth the love of any woman,
Were she ten times a queen !

LAUNCELOT. She does not love him ?
Are you sure, sir ? Are you sure ? I dare not hope it.

GALAHAULT. She is as virgin of the thought of
love
As winter is of flowers.

LAUNCELOT. But he loves her ;
And it would rive his heart. He is my friend,—
Think, Galahault, my friend !

GALAHAUT. Love knows no friend
Nor foe save friends and foes to his desire.
Seek not to palter with him, for he is
More tyrannous than Nero in his cups.
He will endure no bargains, so much love
And so much virtue. You must yield him all
Or he'll not grant you anything. What profits
The King if for his sake you let all slip ?
Why, that were chivalry run mad, for though
She love not you, she ne'er will love the King.
Seek other rivals, for not all the charms
Of Merlin and the Lady of the Lake
Would now avail to quicken in her lone heart
A pulse of love for Arthur. Did she hate him,
That might turn love ; but when a husband seems
A mere indifferent covenanted thing,
She's like to love the Devil sooner. And can
You calmly think that even your friend of friends,
Lacking her heart, should call her body his,
Should sting that throat with kisses and—— ?

LAUNCELOT.

Damnation!

Her body?

GALAHAULT. Ay, I said so.

LAUNCELOT.

Not if he

Were fifty friends or fifty hundred kings!

GALAHAULT. Why, now you are a lover. Come
with me,

The Queen is in the orchard.

LAUNCELOT.

Galahault!

GALAHAULT. Look through the casement here.

See where she walks,
As if a rose grew on a lily's stem,
So blending passionate life and stately mien.
How like a lioness she steps and pauses,
With grand, slow-moving eyes——

LAUNCELOT. No more! no more! [Exeunt.]

SCENE III.—*A Bower in the Gardens.* GUENE-
VERE and LADIES.

GUENEVERE. You may withdraw, ladies.

[Exeunt LADIES.]

They did him wrong

Who called him but the goodliest of men,
For he is like a god. What did she say?

“ There is not maid nor wife in Camelot
Whose heart is not a spaniel at his feet.”

Oh, I should hate them if they loved him not,
And hate them that they love him. What if he
hide

Unworth behind that fair exterior !

And shall he add me to his list of slaves ?

Yet, though I hate myself that am so cheap,

And love myself that he should be so dear,

And am a thousand things at once, each eyewink

In arms against its neighbor—what should I do,

If he—— ? I am too poor a thing to live,

And yet so happy that I am so poor !

And yet so wretched that I am so happy !

Why, had he laughed into my startled eyes

And asked “ Dost thou adore me ? ” I had lacked

Power to keep back the “ Yes ” within my soul.

Or had he clutched my wrist and pulled me to
him

And bade me love him, there before them all,

I would have put my lips up for a kiss.

. . . Yonder he comes. Why should he seek me
out ?

I am nought to him, one of a thousand women
Whose lives have crossed his somewhere and then
passed

Into the dark. His Queen—a stupid word !
His Queen, when he may hear the lightest wish
Some other utters, as a Queen's command ?
No Queen at all, unless his Queen in all !
I will not love—and he shall never know.
I would I had not sent my maids away.
I lie ; I am glad they are not here. I felt
That he was coming when I bade them go.

[*Enter* LAUNCELOT.]

Does he do reverence to the Queen or me ?—
Good-morrow, sir. You like our gardens, too.
'T is a sweet place ; June lays her heart bare here
And sighs her soul out through the passionate air.

LAUNCELOT. There is no garden like it in the
world.

GUENEVERE. I did not guess you were so fond of
gardens.

I thought of you with lance and battle-axe
In the forefront of war—yet not as one
That kills his fellows with a savage joy—
But with pale brow where anger never writ
His ugly name in frowns.

LAUNCELOT. You thought of me ?

GUENEVERE. Who does not think of you ? Your
fame is blown
Further than Cameliard.

LAUNCELOT. And you thought of me
As hard and cruel ?

GUENEVERE. Never for a breath !
And yet I did not think that you would feel
The strange delicious sweet of such a place.

LAUNCELOT. I never felt it as I do to-day,—
Though I remember, when I was a boy,
There was a beautiful lady who would come
Across the lake and take me in her skiff
And tell me wondrous tales, tales which still make
A low confused murmur in my brain
Like the vague undertone of many bees.

I called her "fairy mother" then, but now
Men tell me that she was that Nimue,
The Lady of the Lake, whom Merlin loves.
I know not. I remember only how
I leaned my head over the boat's edge, looking
Deep through the water to another sky,
So clear the water was ; and, as I leaned,
My soul went swooning down that crystal space,
Down, down forever, till sinking seemed to turn
To rising, with the sky not far away.

GUENEVERE. Tell me more of your life. You
must have seen
So much in its young course—have done so much.

LAUNCELOT. Nay, little that I can remember.
I am

Strangely unable to distinguish one
Good or ill hap out of the blur of things,
Battles and tourneys, one much like the other,
And lost already in the murmurous past.
I feel as if I were just born to-day
With life before me like this summer air,
Hushed, as in waiting for a bird to sing,
Who yet delays, and all is fresh and fair,

And hope stands flushing like a rosy boy
Upon a threshold which he fears to cross.
But what I fear or what I hope, indeed
I hardly know—and yet I hope and fear.

GUENEVERE. But surely some recognizable peak
Soars up among the mountains of your deeds
That you can show me.

LAUNCELOT. Indeed there is a height
So near me that it shuts out all my life ;
But I have not attained it. One event
I well remember, but it was a vision,
Not an achievement. That was when I first
Beheld you.

GUENEVERE. Have you seen me, then, before ?
And you remember it and I forget ?

LAUNCELOT. I should have died of faintness in
the hills
If you had not stood by.

GUENEVERE. What, were you he
Whom Dagonet the Fool saved ?

LAUNCELOT. I am he.

GUENEVERE. How strangely are the threads of life
inwoven !—

Yet since you will not tell me of your deeds,
Tell me at least for whom you do them.

LAUNCELOT.

Ah, me !

GUENEVERE. I know that for some dame or dam-
osel

You do them. Tell me, by the faith you owe me,
Who is the lady ? For I know thou lovest.

LAUNCELOT. Say that I do so, were it not far bet-
ter

That this new birth had never been conceived ;
Since even while I babble of its joy,
Grief glooms above it like the shadow of death ?

GUENEVERE. What part hath grief in thee, Sir
Launcelot ?

I might as soon paint sorrow on the face
Of blessed Michael standing in the sun.

LAUNCELOT. Queen, that I love is true ; and love
should be

More joy on earth than Michael hath in heaven.
But I have been too much beloved of Fortune ;
And she hath dowered me with all goodly gifts
Only in the end to turn them to a gibe.

For all my feats of arms were done for you,

And if you love me not, it had been better
My mother died a maid—and should you love,
Which yet I dare not hope, our lives must be
Like outcast angels, glorious with shade,
A bitter gladness and a radiant woe.
Ay, for 't is you I love. Love leaped to life
Within me when I saw you in the hills,
As Saint John leaped within his mother's womb
When Mary drew near, childing of the Christ.
Speak to me ! Will you outstare marble ? God !
I say, I love you. See, I crawl to you !—
I pray you pardon me. I see you are
Too merciful to speak. I give you pain ;—
I have spoken wildly. Fare you well ! I will not——
[*Rushes off.*]

GUENEVERE. He loves me ! Oh, how good it is
to draw
Deep breaths of this rich-scented air. The odor
Seems to pass into me. Does love transfigure
The world like this ? Nay, then it is a god,
That's certain.

[Enter GALAHAULT at the back among the trees.

LAUNCELOT follows him, beseeching.]

LAUNCELOT. Oh, be silent for my sake
Or I shall die of shame.

[Throws himself on his face under a willow in
the background.]

GALAHAULT [advancing]. O cruel Queen !
What have you done to my poor friend ? Look
where

He lies upon his face and heaves his sides,
Like a dumb animal hurt unto death.

Oh, what a loss were there, if he indeed,
Pierced with your scorn, should die !

GUENEVERE [musing, unconscious of GALA-
HAULT'S presence]. The greater loss.
Were mine. O heart, my heart, rememberest thou
What he has said ?

GALAHAULT. What ?

GUENEVERE. If his words be true,
He has done all his deeds of arms wherewith
The sky's blue concave rings, for me, me only.

GALAHAULT. He may well be believed, for as he is

Of all men the most valiant, so he hath
A truer heart than others.

GUENEVERE. They say well
That he of all men is most valorous,
For he has done such doughty feats of arms
As no knight else. And this, all this he did
For me.

GALHAULT. Why, then, you should be pitiful.

GUENEVERE. How pitiful, in sooth? The cliffs
and crags
Of Cameliard have left me ignorant
Of much, I doubt not, that our Camelot dames
Suck with their mother's milk. But yesterday
Love was to me an idle poet's song.

GALHAULT. This is not yesterday; for now you
know
How more than all fair women he loves you,
More than his life, yes, more than his own soul;
And that for you he has done more than knight
Did ever yet for lady.

GUENEVERE. More indeed
Than I can ever merit. Could he ask
Anything of me that I could deny?

—But he has asked me nothing. Only he is
So sorrowful that it is marvellous.

GALAHAULT. Then heal that sorrow, madam, for
you may.

GUENEVERE. He asked me nothing.

GALAHAULT. Nor would never ask,
Love is so fearful when it is new-born.
But I plead for him. This is what he would,—
That you should love him and retain him ever
To be your knight, and that you should become
His loyal lady for your whole life long.
Grant this and you will make him richer far
Than if you gave the world.

GUENEVERE. I have given him all
The world I have, the world of my own thoughts,
Desires and aspirations, hopes and fears.
—You see, I trust you, sir. I know not how
You come upon my dream, like a strange shape
That casts a shadow where no shadows are.
But you are here, although you be but thickened
Out of the air before me, as my thoughts
In like wise now round to a definite orb.
I know that he is mine and I all his,

And that you somehow, strangely, have been part
Of things ill done and mended.

LAUNCELOT.

No, I dream.

It is not she that speaks. Dear God, if this
Be but a dream, oh let me die and find
That heaven is just to dream forever thus.

GALAHULT. Gramercy. Now 'tis fit you enter on
Love's service. Kiss him once before me, madam,
For the beginning of true love.

GUENEVERE.

Those yonder, sure,

Would marvel much that we should do such deeds.

GALAHULT. No one will see. [*Turns away.*]

GUENEVERE. And if they did? — Why, Launcelot,
You tremble like a leaf. Will you not kiss me?
Are you afraid? Nay, then I will kiss you.

[*She takes him by the chin and kisses him.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Camelot. Gallery and portico in the apartments of the Queen of Orkney, overlooking a great water.* LIONORS and BORRE.

BORRE. Mamma,

I like to talk to you about Gawaine.

LIONORS. Why, darling ?

BORRE. Because you hold me close to you,
And kiss me so.

LIONORS. My little innocent wisdom !

BORRE. Gawaine never kisses me. And yet he is
kind ;

He gives me sweets and—Oh, mamma, look ! look !
The moon—how big it is ! It comes right up,
Right up out of the mere, just like Gawaine
When he is swimming. You know, he plunges under
And then his head comes up 'way over yonder,
And then he shakes the drops out of his hair
And wipes his eyes with his fingers. The moon is bald
Like poor old Hugh the gardener. That's why
The water doesn't stick to it.

LIONORS [*kissing him*]. Sweetheart! See
How still the moonlight lies upon the water!

BORRE. It's like a silver road.

LIONORS. How would you like
For you and me to go out hand in hand
As we do i' the meadows, and pluck those flowers
That grow on the waves by moonlight, and so go on
And on and on until we came to Fairyland?

BORRE. I'm 'fraid we'd get our feet wet.

LIONORS. I'm afraid we might.

BORRE. But what's a road for, if you mayn't walk
on it?

Mamma, I don't think it's a road at all;
It's a river.

LIONORS. A river, love?

BORRE. A river of shine;
The fairies go swimming in 't.

[*Enter PEREDURE.*]

LIONORS. Good even, sir.
The Queen of Orkney is engaged within.
So please you wait with me a little while,
She'll see you presently.

PEREDURE.

I will remain ;

You are very gracious.—Well, my little dreamer !
What are you thinking of, with your great brown eyes
Looking so wistfully on the mere ? Come, kiss me.
What do you see out there ?

BORRE.

My lord, who lives

I' the sea ?

PEREDURE. Why, the fishes, Borre.

BORRE.

And the old crabs

With their great ugly claws—I know. But I think
A princess lives there in a crystal palace,
All white and cool, with crabs to guard the gates.
That's why their arms are so long, you know—to
catch

The robbers with.

PEREDURE. Are there robbers in the sea ?

BORRE. Oh, yes ! that's such a pretty story.

Mamma,

Tell it to him—you know, the one you told
Last night—about the water-kelpies that tried
To steal the princess' treasure.

LIONORS.

Some other time,

Sweetheart.

BORRE. Oh, please, mamma, please tell it !

LIONORS. Not

To-night, dear. It grows late, and it is time
For little folk to be abed. Come, Borre,
We'll go find nurse.—Excuse me, pray, my lord ;
I will return soon.

BORRE. I don't want to go ;
I am not sleepy.

PEREDURE. Let me carry him.
Wouldn't you like a ride upon my shoulder ?
That's it. Now we go. Lead on, my lady.

BORRE. Hey !

[Exeunt LIONORS, PEREDURE, and BORRE.]

[Enter MORGAUSE and PUBLIUS.]

PUBLIUS. If it be true, as you suspect——

MORGAUSE. No fear !

You are very wise and subtle, good my lord,
But trust a woman's wit as subtler still
Where woman's heart's at question. You were
there ;
Your eyes were fixed, as all eyes, on the Queen ;
Yet you nor no man there saw what I saw.

I tell you, when a woman's eyes are lit
With such a light as that I saw in hers
The while she gazed at Launcelot, 'tis small matter
Whether she flinch or falter to the world—
She loves.

PUBLIUS. Well, let us grant, then, that she
loves;

You women sometimes prove absurdly right,
And I incline to trust you. But the King
Will ask more solid proofs.

MORGAUSE. And he shall have them!
Ay, if I pull the ruin on myself,
I'll find the engines somewhere to upheave
The pillars of his peace. Oh, he doth vex me
Beyond endurance with that calm of his,
That silly satisfaction on his face,
As if he were some god, forsooth, and deigned
To live with men as a sun might deign to shine.

PUBLIUS. Do not forget the most important
thing,
That Launcelot must quarrel with the King;
For thence I see a great advantage grow
For Rome, and you will not forget, I hope,

That Cæsar's vantage wins for Arthur's ruin.

I do not ask you why you hate the King ;

Work for my ends and I will work for yours.

MORGAUSE. Agreed. But we must cast our lines
for proofs,—

And yonder comes an angle for my hook.

Withdraw, my lord ; leave me alone with him.

PUBLIUS. My humble duty, madam.

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter PEREDURE.*]

MORGAUSE.

Peredure !

It is kind in you to come to me, my lord.

Sit by me here. I am sad to-night and know not

What 'tis oppresses me.

PEREDURE.

Would that I had

The power to shield off sorrow from you, madam !

MORGAUSE. Why, would you use it if you had,
my lord ?

A little thing might do it for the nonce,

But yet I fear me you would scruple.

PEREDURE.

Scruple ?

I am no coward ; I would die to serve you.

MORGAUSE. I know you are no coward, and I think
You are indeed my friend.—Too much of this !
You are a poet. Sing me a sweet song,
Whose music may caress my painèd heart.

PEREDURE. Lend me your cithern, lady.

MORGAUSE. Who says now
That I am not the royalest queen alive,
That have a king's son for my troubadour ?

PEREDURE [*sings*].

You remind me, sweeting,
Of the glow,
Warm and pure and fleeting,
—Blush of apple-blossoms—
On cloud-bosoms,
When the sun is low.

Like a golden apple,
' Mid the far
Topmost leaves that dapple
Stretch of summer blue—
There are you,
Sky-set like a star.

Fearful lest I bruise you,
How should I
Dare to reach you, choose you,
Stain you with my touch?
It is much
That you star the sky.

Why should I be climbing,
So to seize
All that sets me rhyming—
In my hand enfold
All that gold
Of Hesperides?

I would not enfold you,
If I might.
I would just behold you,
Sigh and turn away,
While the day
Darkens into night.

MORGAUSE. You sigh, my lord. Did not the
lady yield,
After so sweet a plaining in her ear?

. . . Methinks I had not been so obdurate.

To give unsought is sweetest to the giver.

Love such as yours, that asks no recompense,

Pleads for that reason more persuasively.

. . . Men love not often so—in Camelot.

PEREDURE. The beautiful lady of my soul, for
whom

My song was made, knows not my love for
her.

The greatest happiness that I can hope

Is to sing for her, sitting at her feet,

As I do now at yours. I dare not vex

Her spirit with the story of my love,

Lest I should lose the little bliss I have

Nor gain no greater neither.

MORGAUSE. You are too fearful.

Who would not throw a bit of glass aside

To win a diamond? You cheat yourself

With the vain semblance of a love, my lord.

Be bold and snatch the real. Why, who knows

But that your lady pines to yield herself

As you to win her?

PEREDURE. Oh, do not stir up

The devil in my soul ! There is a chasm
Between our ways.

MORGAUSE. And will you let her droop
And die, poor lady, dreaming that her life
Is wasted ointment spilt out on the floor,
When but a word were Siloam to her eyes
To let her see she had poured a priceless chrism
Over the very body of Love ? If she
Were I and spoke to you as I do now,
How would you answer her ?

PEREDURE. Upon my knees.
Forgive me, my beloved.

MORGAUSE. What do you mean ?

PEREDURE. That you indeed are she.

MORGAUSE. Alas, alas !
What must you think ? Indeed I knew not this.

PEREDURE. Oh, kill me with your hands, not
with your grief.

Oh love, love, love, I ne'er had thus offended,
But all my brain was whirling with your words.

MORGAUSE. We are most fortunate and unfortu-
nate.

PEREDURE. And dost thou love, then, too ?

MORGAUSE. I have loved thee long.—
Why do you tremble so? Surely it is
No sin that we should love.

PEREDURE. Can that be sin
Which makes me greater-hearted than before?

MORGAUSE. Why do you stand apart? Let me
lean on you.—
Oh, take me in your strong arms, Peredure!
Surely it is no sin for us to kiss.

PEREDURE. God help me, I scarce know where
sin begins;
For I am caught up in a wind of passion
That sweeps me where it will.

[*The tinkling of a lute without.*]

MORGAUSE [*starting*]. It is not safe
For you to be found here so late. I hear
My women with their lutes. Nay, do not go—
Nay, but you must—but first one kiss, my love.—
Give me the key to your secret door. I'll come
To you; we shall be more secure than here.

PEREDURE. Come quickly, then, or I shall scarce
believe
But I have slept i' the moonlight and seen visions.

FOURTH WATCHMAN. Not but I think our Owen, the blacksmith, would run him hard.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Oh, you think, do you? You're a fine one to think. Owen, the blacksmith!

THIRD WATCHMAN. They as thinks, goes to hell; leastwise Father Aurelian says so.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Owen, the blacksmith!

FOURTH WATCHMAN. Well, I suppose a blacksmith may have muscle in his arm, as well as a king.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Ah, there you goes a-supposing. The King, sir, is the King, and is not to be supposed.

THIRD WATCHMAN. Ay, 'tis a hanging matter to suppose the King—except for the Pope. The Pope can suppose anything.

FIRST WATCHMAN. You go too much to the priests, David. Father Aurelian knows not everything, though I will not deny that he can say mass quicker than any priest in Camelot. The Pope cannot touch the King except in the way of cursing, and it's not likely the Holy Father would curse anybody—unless he were mightily provoked.

SECOND WATCHMAN. That's true, neighbor.

FIRST WATCHMAN. The King is the head in things temporary, and the Pope in things spiritual.

SECOND WATCHMAN. And that's true, too.

FIRST WATCHMAN. And I say again, the King is the strongest man in the kingdom. Before he was crowned, he pulled the great sword out o' the stone at Canterbury, where it was fast stuck, so that all the nobles in Britain had tugged away at it and none o' them so much as budged it. And they say the devil put it there, but that is not likely, for the Archbishop said that whoever should pull it out should be king, and it's not to be believed that the Archbishop would meddle with the devil. Well, at last the King came, but he was not King then, but no matter for that ; and he heaved away at it and out it came so sudden that away went His Majesty heels over head backward and was near to break 's neck. And they call the place Arthur's Feat to this day, because there Arthur lost his feet. And I say, the King is the strongest man in Britain.

THIRD WATCHMAN. But that was a magic sword ; it vanished afterward.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Magic ! Poh, David, you'll believe anything.

THIRD WATCHMAN. If it did not vanish, where is it now ? Answer me that.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Masters, we are set here to apprehend benefactors. But I take it that no benefactors will be in the street at this hour, for there is a law that no one be abroad after nine o' the clock but the King's watch. Let us go into Master Howell's tavern. If there be any benefactors they will be there.

FOURTH WATCHMAN. Ay, we'll go have a pot of ale. But we must come back anon, for there might be honest men abroad.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Truly, and if any honest men be stirring, they will take it ill that the watch be not by to protect them.

THIRD WATCHMAN. But 'tis against the law to be out at this time o' the night ; and can a man be a true man and break the law ?

FIRST WATCHMAN. In a case of necessity he

may, for necessity knows no law. And I feel
myself a pressing necessity now for strong waters.
Come, masters. [Exeunt.]

[Enter GUENEVERE, disguised as a Page, and GAL-
AHAULT.]

GUENEVERE. Pray, how much farther is it? We
have come

A long way from the palace.

GALAHAULT. We have but

To cross the little bridge beyond and pass
Under the row of willows to the left,
And we are there. It is a place I built
Some years ago when I had use for it.
But now the flowers have sown themselves at will
And the wild vines, untrimmed, have overflowed
The trellises and run along the ground,
Tangled with violets, and hollyhocks
Start straight and sudden in the very walks.
The simple people of the neighborhood
Say it is haunted, having no way else
To explain infrequent lights and seldom signs
Of habitation in such solitude.

Yet though it has a barbarous outside,
You'll find within that all has been made ready
Even for a queen's sojourn.

GUENEVERE. I thank you, sir.

How looked he when you left him ?

GALAHULT. Why, as one
Who is about to die and has seen heaven
Opening before him.

GUENEVERE. But did he send no word ?
Oh, pardon me, I have lost all my pride,
And I must hear you speak of him.

WATCH [*within*]. Ho, there !

GALAHULT. Stand close, it is the watch ;—and
speak no word,
But keep your face in shadow.

[*Enter the WATCH.*]

FIRST WATCHMAN. Stand all together that they
may not rush upon us suddenly and overpower us.
—Who goes there ?

GALAHULT. What, old Griffith ! What do you
mean, you old oracle ? Do you forget me ?

FIRST WATCHMAN. Bless us, masters, if it be

not the Prince ! I hope your Highness will pardon me. Now who'd a-thought 't 't would a-been your Highness ? Ah, your Highness knows what's what, a-going about in the night, when all honest folk is a-bed. But it's not for me to say when your Highness should go in or come out. And I hope your Highness will not forget the watch.

GALAHULT [*throwing purse*]. Drink my health, Griffith,—you and your fellows. And if you get very drunk, I'll see you are none the worse for it. Come, boy.

[*Exeunt GALAHULT and GUENEVERE.*]

SECOND WATCHMAN. What did he give you ?

FIRST WATCHMAN. Gold ! Ah, there's a prince for you, he is ! I have carried him home drunk these many times. He knows what belongs to a gentleman. And did you hear what he called me ? An oracle. That's as much as to say, a man of parts. Mark Antony was an oracle—he that killed Cæsar in the play. He killed him oracularly.

FOURTH WATCHMAN. Not a one of you had come back but for me. You were so thirsty you could see naught but the tavern window.

FIRST WATCHMAN. Never you mind. We'll have a drink now as is a drink—and none the worse for waiting and letting our mouths water. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III. — *Merlin's Tower.* MERLIN. *Enter*
DAGONET, *unperceived.*

MERLIN. Burn, burn, ye leaping flames! And yet in vain.

Ye cannot burn away the prison-bars

That gaol my soul from knowledge. Yet burn on ;

A little and a little still I learn.

Yet all the knowledge man can win avails

But to avoid the shock of mighty forces

Which he can neither deviate nor control.

I look out on the rushing of the world

As one who sees the gloom of swirling waters

In the abyss of midnight. On they sweep,

Fatal, resistless, plunging as one mass

From turbulence to booming turbulence.

Whence? Whither? Ye occult unconscious Powers!

How shall I call upon you? By what names?

What incantations?—Fool, what do you here?

DAGONET. Father Merlin, when will the devils appear?

MERLIN. What mean you, Fool?

DAGONET. Were you not conjuring? I cry you mercy, I thought it was an invocation to Flibbertigibbet. Sir Kaye says that Asmodeus was your father, but the Devil himself will be saved ere his wits stop leaking.

MERLIN. I do not take that. How should his wits leak?

DAGONET. Marry, I am sure his brain's cracked. He put me in the pillory the other day for making a jest that passed his understanding, but he will be pilloried with my jest long after I have ceased jesting with his pillory.

MERLIN. What, were you in the pillory, Dagonet?

DAGONET. Long enough to feel an imaginary ruff about my neck still. But by the intercession of the Queen, I was delivered. I hope her issue may be nobler.

MERLIN. Her issue? Where is the sequence in this?

DAGONET. That if her issue be no nobler than

mine, it will be something scrofulous, for I was delivered of a galled neck. Father Merlin, can you undo a spell as well as contrive one?

MERLIN. Why, Fool?

DAGONET. The Prince of Cameliard is bewitched; he does nothing but sigh.

MERLIN. Why, you should be the physician to heal him of that ailment. For what purpose else does the King keep you?

DAGONET. Nay, the jester is a physician that heals none but the well. The sick will have none of him, neither the sick in body nor in wit nor in heart; for the sick in their bodies desire the sympathy of long faces; and the sick in their wits think they are mocked, because they do not understand what is said; and the sick in their hearts speak another language—laughter is bitterness to them and their recreation is in groans. And Prince Peredure is in the third of these categories,—he is in love. Indeed, Father Merlin, he is past my medicining, and I would you would cure him.

MERLIN. Would you have me cure youth of love? Then I were a magician indeed.

And yet I know, in part, of what you speak ;
And I would counsel you, good Dagonet,
To have an eye upon the Queen of Orkney.
She works with devious indirections, and
This love of Peredure may be to her
A point to rest the lever on, wherewith
She pries at greater matters. Come with me ;
I have employment for you. 'T works so, does 't ?
Fate lays on her a bitter-hearted life ;
Even as long ago I prophesied
That woe should whelm her past all woman's woe,
And woe past woman's from her heart should flow
To whelm the world — and Time unwinds it so.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—*A forsaken garden.* LAUNCELOT.

LAUNCELOT. It is the hour ; and yet they do not
come.

The sentinels grow drowsy at their posts ;
And the wind rustles through the moonlit leaves
Like one that tosses on a sleepless bed
And wishes for the dawn. The shadows sleep,

Silent as time, beneath the silent stars ;
And distant dogs behowl the loneliness.
O Moon, look down and lead my love to me ! . . .
Sir Galahault ! Sir Galahault ! I wonder
If it were wise to trust to you so far.
Nay, 't is unknighly in me to misdoubt
So true a heart. Who else but he had made
The evil fortune of my love his own
And dared for me all I myself can dare ?
And yet to take my joy within his doors,
With secret entrance like a midnight thief,—
It irks me. Bah, I am a fool ! What's place
Or time, when I clasp hands with Guenevere ?
To look into her eyes is to forget
That space exists, beyond her circling arms !
Hark ! did I hear the rustle of a cloak ?
Or was 't the wind i' the lilacs ?

[*Enter GALAHAULT.*]

Galahault !
Alone ?

GALAHAULT. Are you alone ? And is all safe ?
For what I bring with me is worth all Britain.

LAUNCELOT. All Britain ? All the world !

[*Enter* GUENEVERE.]

My queen ! my queen !

GUENEVERE. Sir Galahault, needs must that once
you loved.

'T is some lost lady's memory, sure, that stirs
Your will to do these gentle deeds.

GALAHAUT.

I know

Love is the one intelligible word

Life utters.—But I pray you, pardon me [*smiling*],

I know, besides, that though you throw an alms

Of kind thoughts to a man whose life is lived,

The fleet-foot hours are restless to become

Spendthrift of richer treasure. Fare you well !

I will not irk you with a formal leave. [*Exit.*]

GUENEVERE. Now !

LAUNCELOT. Heart to heart !

GUENEVERE. Oh, do not jar with speech

This perfect chord of silence !—Nay, there needs

Thy throat's deep music. Let thy lips drop words,

Like pearls, between thy kisses.

LAUNCELOT.

Thy speech breaks

Against the interruption of my lips,

Like the low laughter of a summer brook
Over perpetual pebbles.

GUENEVERE. Nay but, love,
It is the saucy pebbles that provoke
The brook's discourse ; for, where the bed is
smooth,
The waters glide as silent as a Dryad
That disappears among the silent trees.

LAUNCELOT. And so our kisses still provoke our
speech.

GUENEVERE. Why, if the night must first be
smooth of kisses,
I fear that I shall talk until the dawn.

LAUNCELOT. Alas, that dawn should be so
soon !

GUENEVERE. We will
Divide each moment in a thousand parts,
And every part a pearl ; and they shall make
A rosary of little lucent globes,
Innumerable as the dewdrops of the dawn :
And, counting them, night shall seem infinite.

LAUNCELOT. Yet even now we count them, and
they pass.

Sit, Guenevere, here where the moonlight laughs
Across your hair, and the night wind may
touch

Your throat and chin, as I do now.

GUENEVERE.

O love,

My lips will weary you, too often kissed.

LAUNCELOT. Why, then the night will weary of
the moon.

GUENEVERE. But I'll be strange and chide ; and
then a cloud

Will pass between you and the moon.

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, then

The moon will 'broider with her light the cloud,—
And I will kiss again, to hear your chiding.

GUENEVERE. My voice will weary you, too rarely
still.

LAUNCELOT. Then will the leaves grow weary of
the wind.—

Hark, how they laugh into each other's ears
And whisper secrets for pure merriment !

GUENEVERE. My love will weary you, too un-
disguised,

Too wild, too headlong, too unlimited !

LAUNCELOT. Then God will weary of the joy of
heaven!

O love, in whom even Love's perversity
Is lovely! O chameleon-colored heart!
Look, I have seen a sky at sunset lapse
From gold and flame to misted violet
And through a thousand shifting colors more,
Olive and pearl and myriad hues of rose,
Each lovelier than the last. Even such a sky
Thy heart is.

GUENEVERE. Then must thou be like the
sun,
For from his kiss the sky takes on her hue.
And surely, if the sun took human shape,
He would become even such a man as thou,
My live Apollo! Spendthrift of thy brightness!
—Nay, let us stay awhile yet, for the night
Doth seem attuned to our hearts and they
Incorporate with the night. Was e'er before
Such rapture in the air?

LAUNCELOT. O teasing Queen!
You slip through my desires and glide away
As a seal swims. Ah, why will you be coy?

Yet coy or bold, each shifting mood you wear
More than the last entrains.

GUENEVERE.

I give you all ;

I am no niggard to keep something back.

But yet, I pray you, stay a little while.

There is a sweetness in all things that pass ;

We love the moonlight better for the sun,

And the day better when the night is near ;

The last look on a place where we have dwelt

Reveals more beauty than we dreamed before,

When it was daily. This is my last hour

Of girlhood ; and, although the wider days

Bring greater guerdons and more large delights,

Yet this one thing they shall not bring again.

Love, yet a little while !

LAUNCELOT.

Your girlhood, say you ?

GUENEVERE. I know not how to tell you —

The morn that followed on my wedding
night,

War called the King to Cornwall, — since which
hour

I have not seen him. — That one night, indeed,

We lay down side by side ;—but, seeing I shrank
And shook as one that fears she knows not
what,

The King unsheathed his sword Excalibur
And placed it for a sign between us twain,
—And all night long the sword divided us.

LAUNCELOT. Mine, mine, all mine !

GUENEVERE. All thine, my Launcelot,
Body and soul ! My husband !

LAUNCELOT. Ay, dear wife,
Although the cowed monastic trees have been
The only priests of our great bridal.

GUENEVERE. Husband !
I laugh into your hair with the mere joy
Of saying it over so. . . . The wicked stars
Are twinkling with a mischievous delight
To spy on us.

LAUNCELOT. Then are they like you now,
The roguery of heaven. Anon, you'll change
And be its splendor and its mystery.
Let us go in ; I have seen you as a vision
Of morning in the hills, and as a Queen,
And as the dainty mimicry of a boy ;

But I would see you grand and undisguised
And clothed upon with moonlight and sweet air.

*[They enter the house. Then all is silent, save
for a rustle of wind in the leaves and the
voice of a distant watchman, calling the
hour. A nightingale begins to sing in the
thicket.]*

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*The Same.* Enter LAUNCELOT and
GUENEVERE.

LAUNCELOT. It is the morning star that hangs so
high ;

Love, you must leave me.

GUENEVERE. Must I so indeed ?

How can I leave you ?—For I live in you.

You are the only concord in my life ;

Without you I am but a jarring note

And all the world mere noise.

LAUNCELOT. No, leave me not.

What though the world outcast us ! We will be

A world unto ourselves. Let Britain sink

Beneath the Atlantic and the solid base

And universal dome of things dissolve

And like the architecture of a cloud

Melt in the blue inane ! You are my country,

My world, my faith, my rounded orb of life.

GUENEVERE. Without you life would be but
breathing death.

LAUNCELOT. Oh, we will find some island in the seas.

Some place forsaken of the unjust world,
A larger image of this garden here,
Where nature's luxury and Art's decay
Proclaim emancipation——

GUENEVERE. There's no such place.

The greedy world would rush in at your heels
And turn your paradise into a mart.
Nay, you were right, and I must leave you, love,
And ere yon pale streaks ripen into rose,
Resume the Queen. But yet one breath beneath
These morning-cool old elms before we part,
One last love-dreaming!—How can I be sure
Thou lovest me? Is life so generous
Of joy?

LAUNCELOT. Oh, look in my true eyes and
say

If thou canst doubt me !

GUENEVERE. Nay, I doubt thee not.

If I had doubted, could I thus have stolen

At midnight in a shameless page's suit
And—oh, thou knowest I could not !

LAUNCELOT. Sweet and true !

GUENEVERE. I feel as if I had put off the Queen
With the Queen's robes and had become your page.

LAUNCELOT. You are my Queen, whatever garb
you wear,

And I your knight forever. But, thus clad,
A thousand beauties are revealed, before
Known only to surmise, or by foreknowledge
That every beauty must be yours divined.
Ay, cover 't with thy cloak ! The prettiness
O' the action o'er-repays my beggared eyes,
Robbed of the treasure of that loveliness.

GUENEVERE. For thy delight, love, I will dress
me so

Ten times a day—but never as a mask
Again. Why wouldst thou send Sir Galahault
To bring me here ?

LAUNCELOT. For thy security.

Here we are free from Argus-eyed intrigue.

GUENEVERE. I like it not—or rather would not
like it,

Were I not too content to let my head
Lie on your shoulder here—so—while Time seems
To pause awhile and dream, beholding us.
It is too much as if we shrank some peril ;
And I would shrink from nothing. Prithee, love,
Henceforward let us meet without these shifts.

LAUNCELOT. O royal-hearted !

GUENEVERE. Sweet, you hurt me.

LAUNCELOT. Nay,

I would not hurt you. I would have my love
A furnace fiery as the orient king's,
But you should walk in it and be unharmed.

GUENEVERE. Was ever woman loved as you love
me ?

LAUNCELOT. I think there never was ; 't is some-
thing new

Whereof I am discoverer. [*Exeunt among the trees.*]

SCENE II.—*The adjacent country. Before the tent
of Arthur.* ARTHUR and GODMAR.

GODMAR. Sire !

ARTHUR. What is it, Godmar ?

GODMAR. From the crest
Of yonder hill one can see Camelot.

ARTHUR. A forced march would have brought us
there to-day ;
But to what end ? The soldiers are fatigued.

GODMAR. Sire, we have marched but fifteen miles
to-day.
We started late and are already camped
While it is hardly afternoon. Besides,
The camp is careless as a hunt.

ARTHUR. What then ?

GODMAR. You will destroy all discipline.

ARTHUR. No, Godmar.
They have earned a little ease ; let them enjoy it.
For tension unrelieved relieves itself
And is ne'er taut again. Let them have time
To talk and tell old stories in their tents
And they'll forget their hardships, and each soldier
Will presently begin to find himself
Of moment to the State, no mere machine
Useful and used as bows and catapults,
But personal ; and Britain thus will grow
A thing wherein he hath a stake himself,

Here is occasion for new victories
And a world-wider glory. For my part,
I think that peace is when the nation sleeps
And when it wakes, that's war. For men in peace,
Lacking brave emulation and the zeal
Of a great cause, fall to their petty ends
And, letting their high virtues atrophy,
Wallow in lust and avarice, till the heart
And nobler functions^s rot away and leave
A people like an oyster, all stomach.
Our men are bold with long success, valiant,
Well-disciplined, far better warriors
Than Roman libertines, and mercenaries
That fight with half their hearts. The cause is just ;
For while Rome kept her legions in the land,
Defending us from the sea-robbing Jutes
And Saxons and against the mountain hordes
Of barbarous Picts, there was a show of reason
Why she should tax us ; now we stand alone
And ask and yield no favors.

MERLIN. Nor would I
Advise your Majesty to yield an inch
To this preposterous impudence. And yet

Delay advantages the crescent power,
And we are growing stronger every year
And Rome declining. If we match her now,
Ere long we'll have the odds. Her boundless wealth
Gives her resources which our general
Too lightly weighs. Nor should we overrate
Our own security. We are one in rule
But not in spirit yet, and local feeling
Still outruns national. The Jutes in Kent
Are yet a daily threat. Therefore, my liege,
My counsel is that we meet words with words,
Gain time to expel the aliens from our shores
And discord from our hearts. Indeed I think
The glory of your reign will more consist
In leaving to the world a living State
Than in your victories. And what most imports you
Is to secure by wise executive
The unity and welfare of the realm.

ARTHUR. You have each spoken well, but I incline
To Godmar's thought. You, Merlin, know full well
The unity of Britain is the heart
And purpose of my life ; but I conceive

This war will make the country more at one
Than all our statecraft, for old enmities
Will melt away into one common heart
When Britons fight against a common foe.
Besides, you shall yourself be deputy
At Camelot, and our home management
Shall be no loser. For the Jutes in Kent,
We'll make them our allies, confirm their lands
In fealty to ourself and win them over
With promises o' the richer spoils of Rome.
For I intend to sack her opulent towns
And pay my soldiers from their treasuries ;
And this sea-people will supply me ships
And sailors cunning in sea-faring war.
And, more than this, I have ancestral claims
To the imperial crown. We'll not return
Until the Pope has crowned me Emperor.

GODMAR. No man on earth save Arthur, King of
Britain,
Could wield so glorious an enterprise.

ARTHUR. What say you, Merlin ?

MERLIN. 'T is a noble plan,
Better than mine though something hazardous,

And for a leſſer captain foolhardy.
And yet it has a weakness, for I fear
The greatening power and riches of the Jutes.
If Britain ever fall, 't will be by them.

ARTHUR. They are too dangerous to be enemies;
They must be friends.

MERLIN. My liege, a word with you
In private.

GODMAR. Sire, permit that I withdraw. [*Exit.*]

ARTHUR. What bitter news now, Merlin?

MERLIN. Be prepared
For any unexpected blow you will.
I fear your sister has some plot in hand
Which I have not unravelled.

ARTHUR. Morgause again !
I have a senseless superstitious dread
That from her comes my ruin ;—but that's a dream.
I'll not be goblin-ridden. Come within
The tent and tell me more of your suspicion.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.— *Camelot. Night. The Gardens.*
Through the trees the towers and battlements.
Enter MORGAUSE and LADINAS from opposite
sides, meeting.

MORGAUSE. Well ?

LADINAS. I have seen them.

MORGAUSE. Seen them ?

LADINAS. From the arbor
I watched them as they strolled ; yet too far off
To hear their words—and yet their words were
sweet.

I could tell that although I heard them not,
They leaned so to each other, like a pair
Of rutting deer that rub their heads together
Before they couple. What they said, no doubt,
Had made a pretty song for the King's ear,
Could it have been re-worded.

MORGAUSE. Was this all
You saw ?

LADINAS. Be patient. I have not done yet.
I saw them kiss—and Launcelot looked about

With guilty fear, but Guenevere looked not
But hung upon him motionless and dumb,
Reckless of all the world. Much more I saw,
But to be brief—at last, after what words
I know not, they departed, she with head
Erect, poised firmly on her royal throat,
But he with wild eyes and a haggard face.
I followed them. They went in by the wicket
O' the private stairway of the Queen's apartments.

MORGAUSE. What say you? In broad noon?

LADINAS. Ay, in broad noon.

At least, she sins with royal carelessness.

MORGAUSE. Her royal carelessness! Her royal
throat!

Is she the only queen, then, in the world?

Doth she bewitch you, too? Where got she
drugs

To make men love her? Do you find her fairer?

Beware, La Rouse! You know how I can hate.

LADINAS. Fairer? There are three fair ladies
in the world,

Iseult of Ireland, Guenevere, and thou—

And thou art first among them. I will not

Deny how beautiful she is, my queen—

Thou art the fairer that she is so fair.

MORGAUSE. Leave courtly phrases till another
time.

What did you when her royalty had passed
Into the palace ?

LADINAS. I bethought me then
Of Peredure's apartments and the key.
I had no thought to find an use so soon
For that—love-trinket. I ensconced myself
Behind a pillar in the gallery
That overlooks the window of the Queen,—

MORGAUSE. And there you saw—— ?

LADINAS. Enough ! Not all I would,—
There was a tantalizing incompleteness
In what I saw ; something, indeed, as when
One thinks one sees more than one really does
When the wind frolics with the petticoats.
And yet I saw enough to make the Queen
A laughter and a byword to the world.

MORGAUSE. Ha, ha, ha !

So then my virtuous brother will receive
A douse of dirty water for a welcome,

When he returns to-morrow morn. The pomp
Of his victorious arms will only serve
To pageant out his shame.

LADINAS. I have set down
A formal notice with the Seneschal
That at high noon to-morrow, when the King
Ascends the throne in the Great Hall to hear
The grievances and quarrels of his knights
And render justice, I shall then appear
And in the presence of the court "impeach
Guenevere, Queen of Britain, Sovran Lady
Of the Most Knightly and Christian Fellowship
Of the Round Table, *et cetera*, of treason
To the most gracious person of the King
And to the safety of the realm, in living
In shameless license with Sir Launcelot ;
And also I impeach for the same cause
Sir Launcelot du Lac, the son of Ban——"

MORGAUSE. Spare me the legal rigmarole. By
this,
The noise is bruited over the whole palace.

LADINAS. Be sure of that ; Sir Kaye will never keep
So rare a bit of scandal to himself.

MORGAUSE. Why, then we have won the throw.

Oh, Ladinas,

You have done that to-day that shall shake thrones !

Launcelot will not tamely yield himself ;

Still less will he sit by and see his leman

Dragged from him to the stake. This work of
ours

Casts Britain to the pit for the beasts of war

To glut their bloodthirst on. — What's that to
us ?

This upstart Queen and that false-hearted prig

Who calls himself her husband and my brother—

She lied, my mother, when she said she bore
him !

And, if he be her husband, what proves that

But that he is a perjurer ?—If she 'scape,

He may be slain ; and if they live, the shame

Will daub them till they die. In any case

I have revenge. I could carouse to-night

Till the elves startled in the glens to hear

The echo of my revelry. Come, kiss me !

Oh, Ladinas, I am drunk with merriment.

Again ! again ! My blood is flames of fire.

LADINAS. Your lips burn and your cheeks are
hot. Morgause!

My pantheress! My splendid devil!

[*Enter MERLIN.*]

MORGAUSE. Beware!

MERLIN. You need no mock propriety. I am
Too gray for envy and too well aware
Of what you do for this play of concealment.
And other things I know; be warned in time,—
Let your intents take wing.

MORGAUSE. You are too late.
Go to Sir Kaye and ask the news of him.
I do not fear you, Merlin.

MERLIN. Fear you God?

MORGAUSE. God cheated me—you know of what
I speak.
I am his enemy as He is mine.

[*Exeunt MORGAUSE and LADINAS.*]

DAGONET [*springing up from behind a clump of
bushes*]. Poor God! Oh, Father Merlin, such roguerie
as I have overheard! But I will tell you anon,
for now I must see whither they are going. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter KAYE, GAWAINE, and PEREDURE.*]

KAYE. It is even as I tell you, gentlemen. Sir Ladas has accused the Queen of high treason, for amours with Sir Launcelot.

PEREDURE. Impossible ! He dare not.

KAYE. The indictment was placed in my hand not above an hour ago. God knows how 't will all end.

PEREDURE. By heaven, he is not chary of his life !

GAWAINE. I say 't is an outrage. What an if it were true ? They are the royalest pair in Christendom ; 't is shameful to seek to dishonor them.

PEREDURE. True ? Why, you lily-livered boy, you dare

To hint it ? By all the saints, if you were not Your mother's son, that word had been your last.

[*A light appears in a window above.*]

GAWAINE. I pray you, pardon me ; she is your sister.

I had forgot it. But I mean to say

That, were Sir Launcelot guilty twenty times,
He doth as far this Ladin as o'erpeer
As mountains anthills. Fie, a worm, a snail !

KAYE. 'T is most deplorable. Let us bring the
news

To Galahault and the others.

[*Exeunt KAYE and GAWAINE.*]

MERLIN. Prince, do you see the light in yonder
casement ?

PEREDURE. It is the chamber of the Queen of
Orkney.

What of it ?

MERLIN. Would you know who has set on
This foul conspiracy against the Queen,
Make you that light your searchlamp.

PEREDURE. What, you mean—— ?

MERLIN. I mean that if you follow up my clue
To thread the meaning of this labyrinth,
'T will draw you, like a moth, into that flame.
I mean that in that dark unriddled heart
That beats beneath the beauteous breasts of Orkney,
Lies like a cancer the true reason why
Your sister's fame is smirched.

PEREDURE.

By heaven, 't is false !

As soon the rosy labor of the dawn
Might bring forth darkness. Now, by all hell's
fiends

Unless I meet an enemy ere long
Beside old age and boyhood, I shall break
My sword against the senseless stones ! What, she ?

MERLIN. Alas, I pity you, but truth will not ;
It is the truth. [Exit.]

PEREDURE. By the five wounds of Christ,
It is the foulest lie that e'er was told.
—Lamp of my soul, behind yon lattice lies
More mystery, more beauty, more delight
Than grizzled Merlin with his lapse of years
Has ever dreamed of. There's more credit writ
In thy dear smile than all his subtleties.
Ah, opal-hearted ! now she doth unclothe
The solemn sweep of her majestic limbs,
The mystery of her awful loveliness ;
And draws the curtains of her couch about her
As some earth-goddess of old northern tales
Might draw the heavy drapery of the night.

[*Enter* DAGONET.]

DAGONET. My lord !—My lord !—Even her case-
ment throws him into a catalepsy. Now what brew
hath the witch borrowed from Circe, that this poor
poet should be transformed into an ass? What ho,
my lord !

PEREDURE. Is it you, Dagonet ?

DAGONET. Like a chair in a dark room ; you wish
I were out of the way. (*Aside*). Oh, that I were any-
thing but what I am, the bearer of ill news ! I could
wish I were a dog, a mongrelly cur, with somebody
kicking me. (*Aloud*.) Are you brave, my lord ?

PEREDURE. Brave ?

DAGONET. I know you are as quick in a quarrel as
a Spaniard, and will whip out your rapier on less prov-
ocation than any man at the court. But are you brave ?

(*Sings*) For there are worser ills to face

Than foemen in the fray ;

And many a man has fought because—

He feared to run away.

Ri fol de riddle rol.

Are you brave, sir ?

PEREDURE. Sure, the Fool's mad. Good Dagonet, I am not in the humor for these fopperies.

DAGONET. Said I not that I was in the way? But, cry you mercy now, would you not thank even a joint-stool, if barking your shins against it saved you from a stumble into the kitchen water-butt?

PEREDURE. Past doubt, Dagonet. What have I to do with this?

DAGONET. Prithee, bark your shins against me, then, and save yourself from drowning, for the butt that lies in your path is bottomless.

PEREDURE. I am in a mood to be exasperated by trifles. If you have ought to me, say it; if not, pray leave me to myself.

DAGONET. Indeed I have something to say, but I know not rightly how to go about it. Sir, you are in love——

PEREDURE. Zounds!

DAGONET. And I would not have you made the tool of an unworthy woman.

PEREDURE. Why, you piebald rascally slave——

DAGONET. Be patient with me, sir; and if I do not prove your love a lewd trickster and trait-

ress, beat me from here to Orkney and back again.

PEREDURE. Lewd?—traitress?—Oh, Christ in heaven! You rogue! you varlet! do you dare——?

DAGONET. Hear me, for I swear I speak no more but the truth! Sir, I have loved you since you were a child on my knee and used to play with my bauble for a toy. Do you think I would tell you so bitter a thing for wantonness?

PEREDURE. Nay, it cannot be but you are abused; some villain, some scurvy rancorous villain hath abused you—but 't was I he aimed at with his knavery. Who was it, Dagonet? Tell me and if I do not run him through with my sword as I would a snake—My God, if I do not find some tangible enemy, I shall burst my heart.

DAGONET. An I thought my eyes were such rascals as you have called them, I would pluck them out. Oh, my lord, tear this false woman out of your heart. She is not worthy that you grieve for her.

PEREDURE. What, will you persuade me the world's a madman's dream? have a care, have a care! I grow dangerous.

DAGONET. Come with me and see for yourself.
I would I could not show you what I must.

PEREDURE. Lead on ;—but if you have played me
false, you had better have fallen in a tiger's jaws.

DAGONET. I have no more to say. If you will
not hear, see.

[*Exeunt DAGONET and PEREDURE.*]

[*Enter LAUNCELOT and GUENEVERE.*]

GUENEVERE. I know that we must take up the
old life

Again, made harder than it was before
But sweeter too. And yet it is all so new,
So glad ! A little longer we will dream.
To-day we will not think of anything
But the dear joy of loving.

LAUNCELOT. The kind Fates
Have given to us this hour. We will not mar it.
To-morrow's riddles let to-morrow solve.

GUENEVERE. I am so glad I am a woman, love.
I have quarrelled with my sex ; but now I see
The heart is keener to recoil from wrong
Than to divine the right, for all my life

Was thwarted but I guessed not why. But now
I would not be a man for all the world.

LAUNCELOT. Nay, I must pity you that you are
a woman, for so you miss life's greatest gift—the joy
of loving one.

GUENEVERE. I would love the woman's way. It
is great to be a man, but it is delicious to be a
woman.

[*Enter MERLIN at some distance, with an astrolabe.*]

LAUNCELOT. Look yonder! How like a visioned
memory

Old Merlin glides among the trees

GUENEVERE. He comes

This way; I will accost him. Merlin, ho,

What have you there?

MERLIN. An instrument to measure

The motions of the stars.

GUENEVERE. Then have you been

In converse with them of the weirds of men;

For you are Destiny's familiar.

MERLIN. As

The child is of its mother, who unfolds

What shreds of wisdom it may comprehend.

Yon skies, that look so mild, are threatening;
Some evil passes in the dark but what
Its name or form the stars will not declare
Till it uncloze its formidable jaws
And fire-like eat its prey and then itself.

GUENEVERE. How wisely they look down from
their high heaven,
Meeting our baffled eyes with that clear sight
Which no enigmas barrier! It must be
In them, if anywhere, our eyes may read
The secrets of our dooms.

MERLIN. Would you yourself
Interrogate their silence?

GUENEVERE. Nay, for then
With each succeeding day I must renew
The burden of the accumulated ills
Of a whole life. Let all be unforeseen
And then we shall not suffer till our time.

LAUNCELOT. Speak not so sadly. I seem to
have just found out
That human suffering is but a cheap price
We pay for heavenly bliss. Think rather, then,
Of joy——

GUENEVERE. The greatest joy is greater still,

When it comes sharp and sudden. — What was that?

MERLIN. Why, I heard n'othing.

GUENEVERE. Nothing? And you, my lord?

LAUNCELOT. Nothing. [*The light in the window is extinguished.*]

GUENEVERE. I heard a woman's shriek.—Who comes?

[*Enter GALAHAULT.*]

GALAHAULT. Madam, I have sought you everywhere. Have you heard

This tale that flies from lip to lip?

GUENEVERE. What tale?

GALAHAULT. Then you must hear 't from me.
Sir Ladinás

Has made a formal accusation, touching
The friendship you have shown for Launcelot,
Which he misconstrues for a lawless love,
Disloyal to the King.

LAUNCELOT. The dream is done—
So suddenly——

MERLIN (*apart*). Alas, then, it is true.

GALAHAUPT (*to* LAUNCELOT). Be scanter of
your speech, lest Merlin note.

The Queen's good name's at stake.

GUENEVERE.

Why, gentlemen,

What ails it with you that you stand aghast?

It is the penalty of eminence

That people grow familiar with our names;

So reverence becomes garrulity,

Then flippancy, then foulness,—till the highest

Is made most common, and even the Sacred Name

Debased to vile and lewd profanities.

Come, Launcelot, I shall keep you at my side

Even more than hitherto, that men may know

That what I do is not for them to question.

[*Exeunt* GUENEVERE and LAUNCELOT.]

MERLIN. How royally she carries it!—Sir Galahault, you are the greatest and most powerful prince in the kingdom, and you have a shrewd knowledge of men and things. Why will you be an onlooker in life, not a participant?

GALAHAUPT. I have drained my cup, and now I drink the air. There is nothing left for me but the ideas of things. What is all this in search of?

MERLIN. Sir, I grow old and I need younger
men

To hold my hands up, like the Hebrew statesman.
You are a man fit for diplomacy
And I would have you for co-laborer
In the affairs of state ; but chiefly now
I would have you assist me to undo
This plot against the Queen. Guilty or guiltless,
The credence of her guilt would rend asunder
Our scarce yet welded kingdom.

GALHAULT. I will do
All that I may for Launcelot and the Queen.
She has bound me to her with her regal ways ;
And he not only conquered my domain
And won me in allegiance to the King,—
His courtesy finished what his sword began,
And won my heart too.

MERLIN. So with me as well
The personal wish chimes with the general good.
For Launcelot, as you know, was in some sort
My foster-son ; the Lady of the Lake
Guided his first dream-thinking and myself
Taught his quick-summered youth.—Go, then, about

Among the lords and ladies of the court
And everywhere proclaim her innocence.
Opinion propagates itself ; your stout
Maintenance of her honor will convince
Many by its mere confidence and make
A party in her favor. In two hours
Meet me in the laboratory in the tower.

GALAHAULT. Wisely devised ; I'll set about it
straight. [Exit.]

MERLIN. O Runic charactery, engraved in stars
Upon the everlasting vault ! wilt thou
Forever mock us with unriddled speech ?
Has thought no cleverness to cheat from Time
The knowledge of thy grammar ? And ye spirits
Of earth and air that with uncertain voice
Speak into too frail words divinities !
Ye oracles and inspirations vague !
We hear your utterance but we miss the sense.
I am the wisest brain of them that know,
And I'm Time's fool. The Queen, from whom I
thought
The perpetuity of the State should grow,
Even she herself is the first sundering

From whence disintegration spreads to all !
Her fate has come upon her and the King's,
And I foresaw not and forewarned them not.
Nay, I myself wrought Arthur to her suit,
Forethinking the realm's welfare. Alas, alas !
I feel the bode of prophecy within me,
And now surely I know that all my craft
Shall be undone and all the King's high dream,
And the Round Table shall pass utterly
Which, like a sacrament, showed forth the round
world

In that ideal unto which it moves.

How can this be? Blind Chance, that seems at
times

To have malevolent intelligence——

*[Enter PEREDURE, with dress disordered, and
without his sword.]*

The Prince of Cameliard? In this disorder?

What is the matter, sir?

PEREDURE. Art thou not Merlin?

I think thou art ; but make me sure, for I

Cannot believe my eyes are truth-tellers.

MERLIN. For certain, I am Merlin. But, my lord,

Why start you so and stare? You are not well.

PEREDURE. Why, I am glad to hear it. To be well

Is to be one in millions. I am glad

That you are well, sir—very glad, by heaven!

MERLIN. This is too serious for the matter, and Attention is not in it. What would you say?

What ill has happened? Alas, he hears me not.

PEREDURE. I killed him in her bed.

MERLIN. Killed, say you, sir?

PEREDURE. I see you have white hairs and a white beard;

But yet I know what you, for all your wrinkles,
Have never dreamed of. There is not a woman
In all the kingdom, ay, in all the world,
But she's a — magpie. Let's be merry, then!
Let us have cantharids and wine!

MERLIN. My lord,
Withdraw with me. There's wine within.

PEREDURE. There's blood
Within—wine, do you call it?—Ay, the butt's

Split open now and all the wine's on the floor.

The thirsty planks drink it up gloriously.

In her bed, did you hear?—Just heaven! I tell you
I killed him in her bed.

MERLIN. Whom did you kill?

PEREDURE. Not her, not her! Look you, how
modestly

She gathers up her kirtle as she walks;

And yet within 's twelve hours she hath been —
Faugh!

MERLIN. What look you on?

PEREDURE. Not her! She was too fair;
I could not dapple that white skin with blood.—
Give me your hand; I would touch something.—
Death?

She is not dead. How can her spirit walk?

—Why, so! Why, so! She is gone again. Oh,
Merlin,

The moveless stars in heaven shift and reel
And there is nothing stable in the world.

MERLIN. Come in with me out o' the damp night
air;

It is too chill to stand without your mantle.

PEREDURE. Off, strange old man! I have a
poniard yet.

Off! I will kill the man that hinders me.—

Why, how it glistens in the treacherous moonlight!

Is it alive, that it should look on me

With such a haunted silence?—'T is like the gleam

Of death-fires in the cruel sea at night.—

What does it say with its cold eye?—Why, now—

God!—it comes back—that pallid room—Morgause—

How fearfully a dead man glares by moonlight!—

False, false!—O Christ!—O pitiful Virgin!—false!

*[He kills himself. As he falls, MERLIN bends
over him in the moonlight.]*

CURTAIN.

ACT V.

SCENE.—*Camelot. The Great Hall of the Palace.*

On the left, two thrones and other raised seats, not quite so high. DAGONET, BORS, and ATTENDANTS.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Careful there, careful! Have you no respect for cloth of gold? Will you handle velvet like fustian?

DAGONET [*to BORS*]. No, but they will wear fustian like velvet. And you heard them in the servants' hall, you would swear they were all dukes, every man of them.

FIRST ATTENDANT. That will do. There is much elsewhere to be made ready and the King is even now at the gates of the city.

[*Exeunt ATTENDANTS.*]

BORS. It is the saddest tale I ever heard.

DAGONET. I'll never attempt to undeceive a

happy man again, if he be in love with Merlin's grandmother, Lilith herself. What a plague had I to do interfering? The devil take all meddlers, say I?

BORS. And Merlin bade you seek me with this news?

DAGONET. Knowing you to be a staunch friend to Launcelot, for he connects this new horror with the accusation against——

BORS. Peace, break you off! Here is the Queen herself.

[*Enter GUENEVERE.*]

Good morrow to your Majesty.

GUENEVERE.

Sir Bors,

You are my friend, I think; you are Launcelot's kinsman;

You know—the world knows—all but Arthur know,
Who comes with an unsuited holiday,

What hangs above our heads. That we are guiltless
Does not secure us from a guilty doom.

We have need now of friends. Our dandies here

Give me scant courtesy. I will not think
That you too hold me cheaply or mistrust
The faultless knighthood of Sir Launcelot.

BORS. I know that Launcelot loves you — with
such love

As a true knight may offer when his lady
Is wedded to another. And I would,
In frankness, lady, you had been his bride.
You had been none the less a queen ; his father
Was King of Benwick and his father's brother,
My father, Bors, the King of Gaul. We both
Are of as royal blood as Arthur is
And might be kings, but that we love the King.
For him we have resigned our ancient thrones,
Content to be his liegemen, simple knights
Of that Round Table which is the great sign
Of brotherhood and true equality,
Such is the love we bear him ; but if he
Should do dishonor to Sir Launcelot
Or thee, whose knight Sir Launcelot is sworn,
Let him take heed. We may resume our crowns.

GUENEVERE. I thank you, sir. You are a noble
friend.

Sir Ector de Maris will be with us,
Pelleas, Lionel, and Bleoberis——

BORS. Ay, madam, all our kin.

GUENEVERE.

It will be much

To have so strong a party in the court.

Among the knights I brought from Cameliard

Some must be faithful. There is great devotion

Among them to my brother, and my brother

Loves me as his own soul. He will not fail——

BORS. Alas, my lady, then you have not heard !

GUENEVERE. Heard ? What ? Has aught——?

BORS.

Oh, steel yourself, my Queen,

For I must be the advertisement of woe.

Peredure——

GUENEVERE. Speak ! What ill has happened
to him ?

BORS. He is dead.

GUENEVERE. Dead ? my brother—dead !

BORS.

Alas,

It is so—dead, and slain by his own hand.

GUENEVERE. Grief loves to shoot twice at the
selfsame mark,—

Ah, like a skilful archer whose first shaft

Hath pierced the centre, sends a second after,
That with unerring niceness splits the first.
Where did he this?

BORS. There were two witnesses,
Merlin and Dagonet. Let him tell the rest.

DAGONET. It happened on this wise, my lady.
Your brother was enamoured of the Queen of Orkney,—but in honorable fashion, for he fancied her to be as spotless as a Glastonbury nun. And with this he was fallen into such a melancholy that I feared he would lose his wits. I loved your brother and in my folly I sought to deliver him. I knew what a false jade was the theme of his idolatry and, indeed, that she was this six months coddling with that fine-feathered incontinent French magpie, Sir Ladin de la Rouse. So I lay in watch for the couple, thinking that the truth, though a vile-tasting medicine, would cure him ; and yesternight, finding the two together, I brought Peredure word.

'GUENEVERE. You did well, Dagonet ; for 'tis far
better

To know and suffer than to be deceived
And dote on loathsomeness. I knew myself

Of this infatuation of my brother,
Yet in the thick and tumult of my sorrows
I took no heed of his. You have done well ;
No knight of the Round Table sheathes within
His corselet a more true-steeled heart than you
Cloak with your motley.

DAGONET. I thank you for that speech.
I did not this, forgetful of my Queen.
When first I came on Ladinas and Morgause,
Their talk was all of you,—how he had used
A key that she had begged from Peredure,
To gain an entrance to the prince's rooms,
From whence he said, he had seen——

GUENEVERE. I shall not fail
To recognize this service at its worth.—
Go on ! When you told this to Peredure ?

DAGONET. Then was he like a man that puts his
feet
On ice whose wintry firmness has grown rotten
With the April in the air, and when he thinks
All steadfast, feels it sink from under him.
Away he starts, wild as the tameless horse
Of Tartary, and comes to where they lie.

When I, less swift of foot, came up with him,
I found him standing dumb, with bloody sword,
Over the twitching corpse of that false knight,
His senseless eyes fixed on Morgause, who cowered
Behind the curtains, silent for dismay.
Me she saw not, for ere I crossed the sill,
He threw the hot sword at her feet and fled,
Crying, "She is too fair, she is too fair!"

GUENEVERE. Oh, better were it if his righteous
heel

Had stamped that viper out o' the world. Go on!

DAGONET. There is no more to tell. I followed
him,

But ere I reached the gardens, he was dead.
I found him lying pallid in the moonlight
And ancient Merlin bending over him.

GUENEVERE. He was too delicate to face the blasts
Of this world's winter. He was all compassion,
All gentleness, all love, all tender heart,
So sensitive of thought that he could scarce
Endure the passing of an aimless sigh,
So frail of spirit that the silent days
Were in themselves too burdensome a load.

So,—let him rest. The jarring of the world
Frets his fine ear no longer.—Gentlemen,
Pray, leave me. I would think of him alone.

BORS. Our hearts are with you.

[*Exeunt* BORS and DAGONET.]

GUENEVERE.

Oh, that I could weep
The copious blubber of a village maid,
Uncurbed by royal pride, or consciousness
That o'ermistrusts and will not slack the bit!
Oh, could I weep—and empty woe with weeping!
There is a swelling passion in my heart
Will split all yet. I cannot like a girl
Draw 't off in driblets. Oh, my blameless brother,
Undone for a guilty world! And that which led
To the discovery that was thy doom,
A plot born of a woman's hate for me
And of my reckless fate-contending love!
Oh, what a tangled anarchy is life!
If the rash Will strive in the helter-skelter
To weave for itself a little ordered space,
Its skillless touch pulls unexpected threads
That tighten to 'ts own strangling. Peredure
Is but the first. The implacable net is drawn

About the feet of all that love us. Bors—
Poor faithful, merry Dagonet—all who hold
To Launcelot's cause—must all these spend their
 hearts

That we may love? Do I love Launcelot?
Oh, if I loved him, could I draw him on
So to his own undoing? Shall his name
That even in the young April of his deeds
Greatens in splendor like the northering sun,
Be made a refuse for the ragman world
To fret and fumble with a prodding stick?
O God! Shall I uncage the captive wolves
Of war, to harry the whole land and rend
The offenceless kern, to give my sorrow ease?
It must not be. What right have I to love,
What right have I to joy, that should so play
The Tambourlaine and scourge so many woes
To drag its chariot like his captive kings?
It must not be. Oh, let me take an oath
Before high heaven! Launcelot, I must save
 thee!
Oh, heavy fate, to love and be a queen!
Ay, Peredure, I know it now—too late!

Had I but hearkened to your pleading foresight !
Oh, Peredure, my brother !

[*Enter* LAUNCELOT.]

Launcelot !

LAUNCELOT. Dear heart !

GUENEVERE. Whence come you ?

LAUNCELOT. Speakest thou so coldly ?

I passed Sir Bors without and Dagonet ;
They sent me hither, saying I should find
The Queen here. So, indeed, I do and not
The woman, not the eyes that met my eyes
With proud confession, not the lips that spoke
Quivering but dauntless, saying, " I love thee,
Launcelot."

O Guenevere, hast thou forgot so soon
That thou canst speak with this mechanic voice
And look on me so vacantly ?

GUENEVERE. Forgot ?

I never shall forget.

LAUNCELOT. Then thou repentest.
Ay, now I see the longing in thy face
That thou hadst ne'er beheld me. Be it so.

I was a selfish monster when I thrust
My love into the forecourt of thy life. . . .
And yet—you loved me once. And oh, those hours
When I could feel the warm breath from your lips
Creep o'er my cheek and mingle with my hair !
The sweet long hours whose lingering moments
dripped
Like rhythmic water-drops into a pool
With silver parsimony of sweet sound
As if Time grudged each globule ! Why, now I see
Tears in your eyes.

GUENEVERE. O Launcelot, my king !

LAUNCELOT. My own true wife !

GUENEVERE. Do not call back that time
With any farewell cadence in your voice !
And oh, do not reproach yourself, my god,
For opening to me those golden doors !
We lived then.

LAUNCELOT. There is honey on your lips
As on the Theban child's. I am the bees
That gather it—so.

GUENEVERE. Launcelot !—No, no !
I had forgot. Am I, then, like the rest ?

Is there so much o' the woman in my veins
That resolution, buttressed in with vows,
Cannot endure the first assault of love ?
We have had a radiant dream ; we have beheld
The trellises and temples of the south
And wandered in the vineyards of the sun :—
'T is morning now ; the vision fades away,
And we must face the barren norland hills.

LAUNCELOT. And must this be ?

GUENEVERE. Nay, Launcelot, it is.
How shall we stand alone against the world ?

LAUNCELOT. More lonely in it than against it !

What's
The world to us ?

GUENEVERE. The place in which we live.
We cannot slip it from us like a garment,
For it is like the air—if we should flee
To the remotest steppes of Tartary,
Arabia or the sources of the Nile,
Or that dim region lying in the west,
Where Brandan's holy ships found anchorage,
It still is there, nor can it be eluded
Save in the airless emptiness of death.

LAUNCELOT. Say rather, like the miasmatic
breath

Of swamps that swarm to rankness. In the clear
And unpolluted air of mountain-tops
Freedom and solitude companion. Oh,
Let the dense earth bring forth its venomous growths!
It cannot harm us on the heights.

GUENEVERE. We must not
Attempt the ascent. The perils are too great
That ward the way.

LAUNCELOT. What reck I of the perils
Between me and the graal of my desires?

GUENEVERE. To plunge the land in war! To
rend the kingdom!

LAUNCELOT. You are worth all the kingdoms in
the world.

GUENEVERE. To drag our friends down with us
in our fall!

LAUNCELOT. We shall not fall. And what is
friendship worth
That will not face adversity for us?

GUENEVERE. We rend the holiest bond, the
family.

LAUNCELOT. We but destroy the false, build up
the true.

GUENEVERE.—Think of your childhood's home,
your father's hearth,
Helen, your mother, at her household cares,
The sacred bond from which your life began,
Within whose circle boyhood grew to youth—
Knit by the gentle hand of ageless custom
And consecrate with immemorial rites.

LAUNCELOT. I think of this ; I, too, would have
a home.

GUENEVERE. You have the world ; the family
alone
Is woman's, it alone is her protection,
Her mission and her opportunity.
In it alone she lives, and she defends it,
Even when its knife is in her heart.

LAUNCELOT. And I—
I, too, defend it, when it *is* a family,
As I would kneel before the sacred Host
When through the still aisles sounds the sacring-bell.
But if a jester strutted through the forms
And turned the holy Mass into a mock,

Would I still kneel, or would I rise in anger
And make an end of that foul mimicry ?

GUENEVERE. Believest thou, then, the power of
the Church ?

The Church would give our love an ugly name.

LAUNCELOT. Faith, I believe and I do not be-
lieve.

The shocks of life oft startle us to thought,
Rouse us from acquiescence and reveal
That what we took for credence was but custom.
Though the priests *be* the channels of God's grace,
Yet otherwise they are but men ; they err
As others, may mistake for falsehood truth,
And holiness for sin.—God help me, sweet,
I cannot reason it—I only know
I love you.

GUENEVERE. You are Arthur's friend. Your
love—

Stands this within the honor of your friendship ?

LAUNCELOT. Mother of God!—Have you no
pity ?

GUENEVERE. I would
I could be pitiful and yet do right.

Alas, how heavy—your tears move me more
Than all—(What am I saying? Dare I trust
So faint a heart? I must make turning back
Impossible.)—Best know the worst! I jested—
I—God!—I do not love you. Go! 'T was
all

Mockery—wanton cruelty—what you will—lech-
ery!—

I—

[LAUNCELOT *looks at her dumbly, then slowly
turns to go. As he draws aside the cur-
tains of the doorway,—*]

Launcelot!

LAUNCELOT. What does the Queen desire?

GUENEVERE. Oh, no, I am not the Queen—I am
your wife!

Take me away with you! Let me not lie

To you, of all—My whole life is a lie.

To one, at least, let it be truth. I—I—

O Launcelot, do you not understand?—

I love you—oh, I cannot let you go.

LAUNCELOT. I pray you do not jest a second
time;

I scarce could bear it.—Yet your eyes speak true.
Tell me you speak the truth.

GUENEVERE.

I speak the truth.

Call me your wife !

LAUNCELOT. My wife, my wife, my wife !

GUENEVERE. Love, I will fly with thee where'er
 thou wilt.

LAUNCELOT. Speak not of flight ; I have played
 him false—the King,

My friend. I ne'er can wipe that smirch away
At least, I will not add a second shame
And blazon out the insult to the world.

GUENEVERE. What I have given thee was ne'er
 another's.

How has another, then, been wronged ?

LAUNCELOT.

What's done

Is done, nor right nor wrong, as help me heaven,
Would I undo it if I could. But more
I will not do. I will not be the Brutus
To stab with mine own hand my dearest friend.
It must suffice me that you love me, sweet,
And sometime, somewhere, somehow must be mine.
I know not—it may be some dim land

Beyond the shadows, where the King himself,
Still calling me his friend, shall place your hand
In my hand, saying—"She was always thine."

GUENEVERE. I will do as thou wilt, in this and
all things.

But oh, the weary days !

LAUNCELOT. It is enough
To know thou lovest me—sometimes, perhaps—
Oh, I am but a man !—to feel as now
Thy cheek against my own.

GUENEVERE. Oh, Launcelot,
Peredure is dead.

LAUNCELOT. Thy brother ?

GUENEVERE. He is dead.

LAUNCELOT. I do not wonder that you were dis-
traught.

[*Shouting, etc., without.*]

GUENEVERE. It is the silly rabble that toss up
Their caps for Arthur. He will soon be here,—
Though a king's progress is a tedious one.

[MORGAUSE, *about to enter, perceives* LAUNCE-
LOT and GUENEVERE and *withdraws.* A

slight stir of the curtain shows that she is listening.]

I must go to get me ready for the pageant.

LAUNCELOT. Be not afraid. The charge that's
laid against us,

Cannot be certified by evidence.

GUENEVERE. And if it were—why, then it were,
and so

The burden of decision were removed.

Kiss me ! Farewell, a little while, my love !

It is a woeful world, at best. Thank God

For love, even with its anguish !

[Exit, through a small door back of the thrones.]

LAUNCELOT. Why, then it were !

Ay, even disgrace would be an ease of breath

After this tension of duplicity.

God help me, I am like a man aghast

Between a dragon and a basilisk,

Which one he fronts dilating as he stares

More horrid than the other. O mystery

Of Fate, that folds us with encircling gloom !

What issue sleeps for us in thy dark womb ?

[*As he starts to go out, enter MORGAUSE carelessly. They bow to each other. Exit LAUNCELOT.*]

MORGAUSE. So? Kissing at the very foot of the throne?

What impudence! . . . Why, now I have the witness

Of mine own eyes to carry to the King.

What, billing like two sparrows on the highway,

Shameless of who may see? Oho, my birds!

You are in the springe. And Mistress Eyebrows,
you

Shall lower a little those proud orbs of yours.

Arthur can hardly doubt his sister's word,

Especially when she is Queen of Orkney

And Rome is knocking at his gates for tribute.

But yet there's Peredure to reckon with.

Oh, had I but picked up his bloody sword

And plunged it in his heart before he fled!

But, like an infant, I must lose my wits,

To see him raging so, like a mad bull

That breaks its tether in the fields, and gores

The dull earth in its fury. Poor La Rouse !
He's out of it. He has taken a bath this time
Has frozen all the longing in his veins.
Why, I was fondling him and found it sweet—
And then, so cold, a coldness like damp earth
Or some slow-blooded fishy creature,—pah !
I was a-creep with loathing at the feel
Of that limp dummy, as I dragged it out
And dumped it in the fountain. So much, at least,
Is done to kill the scent. But Peredure?—
Will he be silent when he finds his sister
Is muddied by my hands? No, he will blurt
All out ; and gossip virtue, like a hawk,
Leaving the fluttered Queen, will change its flight
And fall on the new quarry. The accusation
Cannot be held back now, even if I would.
'Tis known to the whole palace. I have sailed
Into a storm that bears me where it will,
And all my hope is to escape the reefs. . . .
Devise, devise. If Peredure accuse me,
As he will surely do, I will be merry,
Jest of his love—I have it, I will say
He would himself have won me to his will

And, failing, slew La Rouse of jealousy,—
But not in my apartments. I must swear
La Rouse was not with me.—That will not do.
Curse him, they will not doubt his word. Fie,
fie!

Cannot I weave a better lie than this?—
'Tis odd I have not seen the boy to-day.
What if he have gone mad—that would not be
So strange—or in a melancholy fit,
Such as he often sullens with for trifles,
Have wandered from the court? Why, there's some
hope.

If he but make no entrance in the scene
That's on this morning—then let him come back!
But, Peredure, it will be to thy—Ah,

[*Enter* PUBLIUS.]

The ambassador!—Good morrow, Publius!

PUBLIUS. My duty to your Majesty. All mor-
rows

Are good when age receives the smile of beauty.

MORGAUSE. Or wisdom deigns to bow to witless
youth.

PUBLIUS. Your Majesty's most rancorous enemy
Would not accuse her of a lack of wit.

MORGAUSE. But wit and folly ever course together.

—Go to, we draw it out too thin. What think you
The King will say to Rome's demand to-day?

PUBLIUS. He will refuse it. He is overbold.
A soldier is but a huge animal

Whose brawn the statesman turns to his own ends.

MORGAUSE. To underrate the foe does not augment

Our strength before, nor glory after battle.

Arthur is not a horse for you to stride,
And Merlin, though the King not always heeds him,
Is shrewder than us all.

PUBLIUS. He will refuse,
Though fifty Merlins counsel. 'T is his pride
That thinks itself a second Julius Cæsar.
Then, with these unforeseen domestic feuds,
He must do battle with enfeebled forces.
And Britain is once more a Roman province.
Where is La Rouse to-day?

MORGAUSE. I have not seen him.

PUBLIUS. Strange ! He was to communicate
with me
At daybreak.

MORGAUSE. The Empire's system of espionage
Is very perfect, is it not ?

PUBLIUS. Your Majesty,
It is my charge ; I cannot praise myself.

MORGAUSE. I fancy, were some enemy of Rome,
Some dangerous enemy, in a foreign court,
Some man who knew too much, we'll say—you could
Remove him, I presume, with little trouble.

PUBLIUS. Were such a man in Camelot, he were
dead
Before the day were.—She has some one in mind.
No matter ; Rome can spend a dram of hemlock
For such allies.

MORGAUSE. So soon as that, indeed !
I see 't is well, to keep in Roman favor.—
Then look to it that the Prince of Cameliard
Never appears again before the King.
'T is well for Rome, I tell you. We have used him
And now he is incensed. He has not been
About the court to-day.

PUBLIUS. If he appear
Too quickly, he shall perish by the knife ;
Else, lest we wake suspicion, he must die
A natural death.

MORGAUSE. St ! Finger on the lips !

[*Enter MERLIN.*]

PUBLIUS. Is the King near ?

MERLIN. He even now dismounts.

PUBLIUS. I must withdraw and seek my fellow-
legates.

Madam, I humbly take my leave,—[*apart rapidly*] I
give

The order at once—[*to MERLIN*] and of you, sir,
most humbly. [*Exit.*]

MERLIN. I am well pleased to find the Queen of
Orkney

Does not forget her brother's interests,
But even spreads her fascinating snares
About the feet of senile enemies.

MORGAUSE. Would all of Arthur's blood were
but as true !

Merlin, I fear my sister, Fay Morgana,

Will set her husband and the King at odds,
If Rome should war upon us.

MERLIN.

Fay Morgana

Would say, "My sister is not otherwise ;
She is so shrewd she ceases to be shrewd."

MORGAUSE. I know my learned sister is your
pupil ;

I never thought to match with her in craft.

MERLIN. Craft is no craft, when craftier is at
play ;

Craft and no craft—and that is all I say.

A woman's wit is subtle but unsure.

MORGAUSE. Why do you juggle with a senseless
rhyme ?

MERLIN. So that your wits may have a tree to
climb. [*Flourish without.*]

MORGAUSE. At last, the King !

[*Enter* ARTHUR, GUENEVERE, LAUNCELOT, GOD-
MAR, GALAHAULT, KAYE, BORS, LIONEL, EC-
TOR, GAWAINE, LIONORS, DAGONET, KNIGHTS,
LADIES, HERALDS *and* ATTENDANTS. *Flourish.* *The KING and QUEEN ascend their thrones.*

MERLIN *takes the raised seat next the King.*
KAYE *stands at the foot of the throne, attended*
by two HERALDS.]

ARTHUR. Fair dames and damsels, greeting !
My lords and gentlemen, most noble knights
Of the Round Table, greeting to you all !
With wassail and rejoicing we return ;
For victory, like the reflected sun,
Sits flashing on our helmets. Cornwall now
Acknowledges our suzerainty and holds
His crown in feoff. This rings the curtain down
Upon the first act of our purposes.
Our Trojan race, enfeebled by dependence
So long upon the strong protecting swords
Of Rome, our cousin and erstwhile our conqueror,
And, that stout panoply and bond withdrawn,
Cleft into pryncedoms and conflicting states,
Lay, when I found it, helpless in its chaos
To make a head against the Saxon raids
Or to cast off the yoke of Roman tribute.
Nor needed there a foreign foe ; for when
Each realm within the realm would be supreme,

What hinders that each lordship do the like,
Each barony, each village, each strong arm ?
Why, such a land is like a rotting corpse ;
For when that harmony and principle
Of union, which is life, is ta'en away,
And each corporeal atom works alone,
The issue is corruption. The great world
Should have one lord, as Britain has at last ;
There lies the true goal of all polity.
But we, at least, are one ; nor only Britain
But many parts of France accept our sway.
'T is fit, at such a joyous consummation,
Wrought with such toil of statecraft and of
arms,
To deck our city like a Queen of May
With many-colored flags and summer garlands,
And make the midnight sky to mock the
dawn
With the red gleam of bonfires on the hills.

[*Sits. Murmurs of applause.*]

What matters in our absence have arisen
That need the scrutiny of the King ? Proceed.

[*The heralds sound.*]

KAYE. First, dread my lord, the ambassadors
from Rome.

ARTHUR. Let them appear.

[*Flourish. Enter PUBLIUS and nine other AMBAS-
SADORS, old men, bearing each a branch of
olive. They kneel before the throne.*]

PUBLIUS. First for ourselves we do
This reverence to your Majesty, entreating
Lest we lose favor in your eyes, in that
We do a graceless office. We are but cogs
In the machinery of imperial Rome
And work our master's will.

ARTHUR. Rise, gentlemen,
And let the throne of Britain know your message.

PUBLIUS [*reads*]. "Lucius, the high and
mighty Emperor,
Sendeth to Arthur, King of Britain, greeting,
Commanding thee that thou acknowledge him
Thy lord, and that thou send the truage due
Unto the Empire, which thy father paid
And other heretofore thy predecessors,
As is of record. Thou, as a false rebel,

Not knowing him to be thy sovereign,
Withholdest and retainest this just impost,
Contrary to the statutes and decrees,
Made by the noble and worthy Julius Cæsar,
Conqueror of this realm and of the world,
First Emperor of Rome. If thou refuse,
Know thou for certain he shall make strong war
On thee, thy realms and lands, and shall chastise
Thee and thy subjects, making an ensample
Perpetual unto all kings and princes
Not to rebel against that noble empire
Which domineth the universal world."

A YOUNG KNIGHT. Gentlemen, shall this gray-
beard insolence
Scoff in our teeth?

*[Several of the younger knights draw their
swords.]*

ARTHUR. Put up your swords. He dies,
Who touches these old men except with reverence.
Fie, would ye strike the herald in his office
Or run upon unweaponed age?—Go, tell
Your lord, there was a king of Britain once
Who sacked great Rome itself, despite the geese

Cackled to save it. As for this demand,
I know no tribute that I owe to him,
Nor to no earthly prince, Christian nor heathen.
Say furthermore that I myself pretend
In virtue of my lineal descent
From that great Constantine who saw the Cross
Blazoned upon the sky for his device,
And conquered in that sign, who was himself
A Briton, son of Helena, our Queen,
And sprung from immemorial royalty —
From him, I say, I trace my high descent,
From him I hold the sovereignty of Britain
And from him, too, the Iron Crown of Rome.
And I proclaim that Lucius wears that crown
As an usurper and a rebel, and
Demand that he and all that are of Rome
Hasten incontinent to do me homage
As their true Emperor, on pain of all
That shall ensue. For, rest you well assured,
If I invade Italia with my chivalry,
The legioned arms of Rome shall stead you little.
This is my answer. But do not for this
Yourselves be too impetuous of return.

Abide some days in Camelot, my lords;
We shall afford you merry entertainment.

PUBLIUS. Your declaration puts the world at war;
We may not dally in a hostile court.

[*Exit, with* AMBASSADORS.]

KAYE [*apart*]. My lord, I would have warned
you of the next;

But I could get no audience in the press.

[*Aloud, reading.*] " Sir Ladinus de la Rouse, a lord
of France,

And Knight of the Round Table, doth impeach

Guenevere, Queen of Britain, Sovran Lady

Of the most Knightly and Christian Fellowship

Of the Round Table, *et cetera*, of treason

To the most gracious person of the King

And to the safety of the realm, in living

In shameless license with Sir Launcelot.

Also he doth impeach for the same cause

Sir Launcelot du Lac, the son of Ban,

Lord of the land of Benwick and the castle

Of Joyous Gard. This charge he undertakes

To prove by evidence irrefragable,

Or else to meet Sir Launcelot in the lists

And whatsoever Knight beside appear
To champion the quarrel of the Queen.
In pledge whereof he offers to the King
The disposition of his life and lands."

[*Profound silence.*]

LAUNCELOT. This is a grievous charge to make.

But why

Comes not the knight according to his bond,
That I may prove his lie upon his head?

MORGAUSE. Because he has been treacherously
murdered —

Therefore he comes not, thou dishonored knight !

KAYE. Murdered?

MORGAUSE. Ay, murdered — by Prince Peredure,
The brother of the Queen ! A strange concurrence !

MERLIN. How comes it, lady, that you know so
much ?

Did Dagonet tell you or Sir Bors ? They only,
Except myself, have known of this. Be careful ;
With too much knowledge you undo yourself.

ARTHUR. Enough ! 'T is well, perhaps, that he
is dead ;

Else this preposterous charge might not be passed
Unquestioned and unpunished. — Is aught else —— ?

MORGAUSE. Oh, not so fast, my royal brother !

La Rouse

Cannot break through his coffin to sustain
His righteous accusation ; but I take
That burden on myself. I shall demand
Bors de Ganys, the Lady Lionors
— You should believe her, she was never false
To you — Prince Galahault, who knows full well
What he is loth to answer, Lynette, Laurel,
Dagonet, some others after, to bear witness.
It is the common rumor of the palace.
You cannot honorably, with that respect
You owe the knights and ladies of your court,
Allow yourself so shamelessly to be
Misused and made a jest of. I myself
Have seen Sir Launcelot and the Queen together
When they conceited they were unperceived.
It was but now I ——

ARTHUR. Silence ! One word more
And, royal and our sister though you be,
Your womanhood shall be your shield no longer

Too much already have we suffered you
To play the spy and weave your deft intrigues
About our footing. Now our slackness ends.
We banish you the court. Go, get you ready !
Sir Kaye will see that, ere the sun is set,
You are far hence in some sequestered castle,
Where you shall have all honor, ceremony,
And revenues appropriate to your state, —
But nevermore be seen at Camelot !

MORGAUSE. Why, be a fool, then, and a wittol,
do !

And while you play the rogue in others' couches,
— As you are celebrated for that sport, —
Your dearest friend shall get the realm its heir.
God punishes your wantonness right fitly,
You prince of lechers and of perjurers !
You, flower of chivalry ! Ay, for chivalry
Means truth to men, if they are stout enough,
And flattering falsehood to a woman's ear.
Murder and lust are the two spurs of knighthood,
Which stains a Lionors and stabs La Rouse !
— Proud harlot, I shall see your downfall yet.

[Exit, followed by KAYE.]

ARTHUR. My Launcelot, sit thou by my Queen.

My lords,

This is my friend — through good or ill report
My friend. Who injures him by word or deed,
Were it but the thin film of an idle breath
Clouding the clear glass of his stainless soul,
He injures me; and but that I am King
And may not, being the State more than myself,
Joust like a simple knight, and but that he,
Our stoutest arm as our most knightly heart,
Needs not my lance to right him, I would slay
With mine own hands the knave that did him
wrong.

[*Turns to GUENEVERE, who rises.*]

And thou, my noble Queen! — If that I ever
By so much as the sully of a thought
Dimmed the bright clarity of thine imaged whiteness
Within my soul, may Christ remember it
Against me at the Judgment!

[*Advances and kisses her, then turns to the others.*]

Good my lords,

Erase this most unnecessary scene
From your remembrance.

LAUNCELOT [*half aside, partly to GUENEVERE
and partly to himself*]. Be less kingly, Arthur,
Or you will split my heart! — not with remorse —
No, not remorse, only eternal pain! —
Why, so the damned are!

GUENEVERE [*half apart*]. To the souls in hell
It is at least permitted to cry out.

CURTAIN.



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